

Samuel Marsden

Reformation Sunday 2000

For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile — the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for,

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?

And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?

And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

And how can they preach unless they are sent?

As it is written, **“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”** (Romans 10:12–15)

In our land, we are greatly blessed to have the gospel – the message – of the Lord Jesus Christ so freely available. But why is it available?

Just think back... If you count yourself as someone who trusts in the Lord Jesus for forgiveness and salvation, how did you first hear that message?

Is it not as Paul writes there in Romans 10? Whether you heard the gospel by radio, or reading a book, or face to face from someone, or in School Scripture, or in Sunday School, or sitting in church... however you heard the gospel, you heard it because someone, somewhere, preached / proclaimed the gospel to you.

And it changed your life forever.

Yes, we must not take for granted the wonderful benefits we have of living in a city where there are so many opportunities for people to hear about Jesus.

But has it always been so?

- Each year at St. Matthew's, we celebrate Reformation Sunday. The Reformation is that period of history in the 16th Century when, to all intents and purposes, the gospel was rediscovered in Europe.

It was during the Reformation that the Church of England, as a Bible believing denomination, was formed. And in the last few years, our Reformation Sunday has focussed on some of the great leaders of that period of history. People like Martin Luther and Thomas Cranmer.

But that was in Europe and in England. How did the gospel come to our shores and take root?

- You might remember that two years ago on Reformation Sunday, we thought about **Richard Johnson** .

Richard Johnson was the first Chaplain to Botany Bay. Johnson was a young evangelical clergyman who sailed on the First Fleet as the result of the vision of leading evangelical Christians in England. We'll hear more about them in a moment.

Last year for Reformation Sunday we thought about one of the great English evangelical leaders, **Charles Simeon** of Cambridge. For something like 53 years, Simeon was a mighty witness for the Lord as he taught the Bible and encouraged and trained evangelical men for ordination. His influence for good spread to the four corners of the earth as men he trained took the gospel to the nations – and that includes Australia.

Today, we're going to think about someone else who has had an enormous impact on our history. He is someone who came from the same stable as Charles Simeon and Richard Johnson. The name of that person will be familiar to us all – **Samuel Marsden** .

1.) How can they hear without a preacher?

In the 1780s, largely as a result of the preaching ministry of Charles Simeon at Cambridge, a small but well-connected group of evangelical Christian men met to discuss how to further the cause of the gospel around the world.

This group included **William Wilberforce** (who fought against the slave trade – and who was a good friend of Prime Minister William Pitt) and the Rev. **John Newton** (ex-slave-trader and hymnwriter). It was this group who would – in 1799 – form the Church Missionary Society. But that was still more than a decade into the future...

As plans were drawn up for a Colony at Botany Bay, these men made their own plans – plans to ensure that there was a Chaplain on the First Fleet – and that any such Chaplain would be a gospel man.

You might remember that two years ago we heard how William Wilberforce persuaded Prime Minister Pitt that it would be A Good Idea. That's how, when the First Fleet sailed from Portsmouth for New South Wales in 1787, the first Chaplain, the Rev. Richard Johnson and his wife, came to be on board.

They were sent to our shores so that – as Romans 10 says – people might hear.

- On his arrival, Richard Johnson was responsible initially for 1,100 convicts, soldiers and settlers. He was a gentle and sensitive man who disliked conflict but stood firm on principle. He was faithful and determined. For six years he ministered alone in terrible conditions, even financing the cost of the first church building – which was not completed until 1793.

You might also remember something of the official opposition that Johnson had to fight against as he sought to hold the everlasting gospel before soldiers and convicts.

He worked tirelessly. Yet, even if the authorities had been favourable towards

him, it was far too big a job for one man, for – as more fleets came – the population of the colony was swelling.

Johnson wrote to his friends back in England, encouraging them – begging them – to send reinforcements.

As it happened, they already had someone in mind for the job...

- **Samuel Marsden** was born in a small town in Yorkshire in 1765. He was the son of a blacksmith and he had his early education at the local school.

Young Samuel was influenced by the Methodist Revival. It's not clear when he became a believer in the Lord Jesus, but in his late teens he was an active lay preacher.

At the age of twenty-four, he entered the Grammar School at Kingston-on-Hull and joined a circle of friends who were linked with the great Charles Simeon at Cambridge. This circle of friends had formed a society, called the Elland Clerical Society – committed to furthering gospel ministry.

One of the generous benefactors of this Society was William Wilberforce, who was a key person in sending Richard Johnson to New South Wales.

Through the Society's generosity, Samuel Marsden was able to go up to Cambridge to study – and he did that in December 1790 – just four years after **Richard Johnson** had sailed to Botany Bay.

- By 1793, there were about ten students who were being sponsored to Cambridge by the Society. Marsden spent a great deal of time learning from Charles Simeon, who was by that time seen as the great evangelical leader in England. From Simeon he learned the importance of teaching the clear word of the Bible.

In a world where stuffy, but godless, religion was the norm, Simeon was a beacon of light – and he was an important influence on Marsden's character.

Samuel Marsden did well at university, but he didn't wait to receive his degree. Instead, mindful of the urgent situation in New South Wales – William Wilberforce persuaded him to accept the appointment of assistant Chaplain in New South Wales.

Marsden was ordained in early 1793. He and his fiancée, Elizabeth, married in April, and they set sail for Port Jackson on 1st July 1793.

At the time Marsden wrote –

I am about to quit my native country with a view to preaching the everlasting gospel.

Oh! That God would make my way prosperous, that the end of my going may be answered in the conversion of many poor souls.

That was Samuel Marsden's great passion. That was why he was leaving everything behind and taking his pregnant wife with him to go to the end of the world. **He wanted men and women to come to know Jesus as their Saviour.**

He knew that unless someone brings the gospel to people, they will not be able to believe.

If he could do that – then what about us?

To what extent are you and I prepared to move out of our comfort zones to tell others about Jesus? Or do we instead want to keep the news to ourselves?

The Marsdens weren't like that. **They put it all on the line for the sake of the gospel.**

- The voyage lasted eight months. Samuel and Elizabeth's first child, a daughter, Anne, was born at the height of a storm off the coast of Van Diemen's Land.

On their arrival at Port Jackson, the Marsdens were made welcome by their predecessors the Johnsons. Samuel got to work straight away, preaching in the

barracks for the first four Sundays, and after that he moved out to the new and strategic settlement of Parramatta.

There – for the next two years – he preached in barns and makeshift church buildings, until in 1797, Governor Hunter laid the foundation stone for the first permanent church building in the Colony – St. John’s Parramatta.

Early in his time at Parramatta, he clashed with the Officer in Command, **John Macarthur**. In fact, he had many run ins with Macarthur.

- From 1800 until the arrival of **William Cowper**, in 1809, Marsden was responsible for all of the inhabitants from Parramatta to the Upper Hawkesbury.

He travelled everywhere – preaching the gospel – and warning against the dangers of a godless life. Marsden was out to change the colony – and that he did in many ways.

He was despondent about the little spiritual growth he saw amongst those to whom he ministered. The Colony was a very rough place in those days! He said he felt nothing but ‘grief and trouble’ in striving to minister to the souls of convicts and government officials.

As part of his ministry in the wider community he supervised two schools for orphans and was closely involved in the work carried out at the Female Factory at Parramatta.

In all, he was assistant Chaplain and then Senior Chaplain for a total of 44 years. He made several trips back to England to drum up support and to recruit more chaplains to join him.

Even from his first months in the Colony, Marsden was held in high regard by (most of) the authorities. And that led to perhaps his biggest mistake.

2.) Success and Criticism

It is sad that he is remembered by most people not as a preacher of the gospel, but as a harsh judge.

In 1795, just one year after he arrived in the Colony, Governor Hunter appointed Marsden a magistrate. In England, it was not uncommon for a clergyman to be appointed as a magistrate. He was responsible for hearing charges against people – especially convicts – and handing out punishment.

As a man of his time, he handed out punishments that are now seen as inhumane. Marsden earned himself the nickname “the flogging parson”.

It is true that, out of all the magistrates in the colony, his punishments were generally the harshest, yet he struggled with his civic duty. He wrote to a friend that, “Heaven has provided the only remedy of sin” .

He knew that people needed to be saved by putting their trust in Christ – and that no amount of punishment given by any magistrate will bring people into a saving relationship with the Lord.

But the problem was that these were people to whom Marsden was supposed to be ministering! By becoming their judge, the relationship of trust that ought to have been there evaporated.

From our distance in time, we can see that Marsden made a big mistake in allowing himself to be too closely allied with the civil authorities. It’s something that Christians have had to grapple with time and time again down the ages. In hindsight, I would hope that Marsden wouldn’t have accepted the position.

- Marsden’s success as a landowner, farmer and breeder of sheep also drew criticism as many believed his pursuit of the acquisition of land unbecoming to his Christian duties. He was very successful.

It all started just a few months after his arrival when he was given a grant of 100 acres of land at Hunters Hill. He proved himself to be a master farmer – when so many others had failed to get anything to grow!

Over the next thirty years he bought – or was granted – thousands of acres all over the Sydney Basin. After the Blue Mountains was opened up, he acquired great tracts of land around Bathurst and Molong as well.

At the same time, he became a pioneer of the Australian sheep industry. In 1797, a ship arrived with about a dozen Spanish Merino bought in Cape Town. He bought one ram and one ewe – and the Lord blessed him greatly. John Macarthur bought most of the rest.

Marsden saw the potential of sheep farming in Australia, and history proved him to be right.

But if Marsden was a successful landowner and farmer, what of the very reason he came here in the first place?

3. The work of the gospel

Despite his well known harshness, in his own time, Marsden was widely respected. When he died in 1838, he was a household name, and was remembered with affection.

Marsden came here for the gospel. His vision was that Australia should become the base for an evangelical mission to the Pacific Islands.

Unlike his predecessor Richard Johnson, Marsden had little success in sharing the gospel with Aborigines. But the story was quite different when it came to the Maoris.

In 1798, some missionaries from the London Missionary Society who had been

working in Tahiti fled to Port Jackson to escape trouble. Marsden met them and learned about their work. (Indeed, one of them – Roland Hassall – later married Marsden’s daughter!) Marsden ended up being the local agent of the London Missionary Society.

In 1803, a Maori chief and his four sons spent some time in Sydney. This motivated Marsden to organise the sending of missionaries to New Zealand.

It took some organising, and he sent others on ahead, but on Christmas Eve 1814, Marsden’s ship anchored in the Bay of Islands – in the far north of the North Island. The next morning he preached to a great assembly of Maori warriors on the text, “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy.”

While still based in Sydney, between 1814 and 1838, he paid no less than seven visits to New Zealand. At the end of that time, he had helped establish 11 mission stations and 51 schools, served by 35 missionaries. Even today, in NZ, Marsden is remembered not as “the flogging parson”, but as “Apostle to the Maoris”.

On several occasions, he travelled to New Zealand to mediate in times of Maori uprising.

- There is much more we could learn about Samuel Marsden. He was one of those people whom God endowed with great strength and stickability. As time went on, other clergy joined him – and in 1829 he was joined by William Grant Broughton, who was to become Australia’s first bishop.

Marsden founded and consecrated some well-known churches – St. John’s Parramatta in 1803, St. Philip’s Church Hill in York Street in 1810, and St. Matthew’s Windsor in 1821 – to name a few. He was first President of the NSW branch of the Church Missionary Society from 1825.

Samuel Marsden died on the 12th May 1838 while visiting the Rectory of St. Matthew’s Windsor.

Today, we see his influence all around the local area. – Marsden Street in Parramatta. Marsden Road – running from Victoria Road up to Carlingford. Marsden High School at West Ryde. Brush Farm, which he once owned. And then the churches he founded – and St. John’s Parramatta where he served for so long.

But more than names on signposts and on foundation stones of churches, we must remember Samuel Marsden for the legacy of the gospel he worked so hard for us to have.

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How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?

And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?

And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

And how can they preach unless they are sent?

As it is written, **“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”**

He may have been a “flogging parson”, but he was also the Apostle to the Maoris – and a clear voice who not only preached the gospel, but who also worked hard to bring other chaplains who would do the same.

He moved out of his comfort zone – and set aside the rest of his life so that people may hear about Jesus. And God expects you and me to do the same.