

In the Scriptures, we find the powerful stories of African individuals who came to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. Simon of Cyrene and the Ethiopian Eunuch are the two obvious examples. At Calvary, we find representatives of all branches of the human family:

- 1) Japheth – the Roman Centurion, who came to a saving faith.
- 2) Shem – the penitent thief, who came to a saving faith.
- 3) Simon of Cyrene – the cross-bearer, whose children are listed later in Scripture, and so we assume Simon was also born-again (see Mk. 15.21; Acts 2.10, 13.1; and Rom. 16.13 to see children of Cyrene and Simon later in the Scriptures).

Yet, when we read mission history, we tend to overlook the profound impact and role of African-American Protestant missionaries. Here is just a small sample of such trail-blazing individuals:

In the 1770s, John Marrant was active in cross-cultural ministry, preaching among the Cherokee, Creek and Native-American nations. John Marrant was from New York City, and conducted his ministry in the face of incredible hostility and personal risk of enslavement. Why? Because he was a free-born African-American.

In the early 1780s, George Liele, the former pastor of the First Africa Church of Savannah, GA, to avoid enslavement in the colonies indentured himself to a British officer, moved with the officer to Jamaica, where he worked off his indenture in 2 years. Subsequent to that, with a handful of former slaves, he planted the First Baptist Church of Kingston, which grew to over 500 members. George Liele is considered the first American missionary outside the shores of North America. He was an African-American.

David George left South Carolina for Nova Scotia to minister among exiled African-American communities, and later in 1792 he travelled with c. 12,000 African-Americans to live in Sierra Leone. Other African-American pastors and church planters sailed for the Bahamas and planted over 150 churches. He was an African-American.

Moving into the early 1800s, we come to the era of Judson and Carey...but not the William Carey we usually hear about and the corresponding upsurge of missions from 1812 onwards to SE Asia. Lott Carey was born a slave in the South before serving as the pastor of a significant African-American Baptist congregation in VA. He coordinated the establishment of the Richmond African Baptist Missionary Society in 1815, and then sailed with his small family to Sierra Leone. After establishing the Baptist presence in Sierra Leone, he and his family moved on to Liberia, where he likewise planted congregations in modern-day Monrovia. Lott Carey was the first American missionary to Africa. He was an African-American.

John Stewart, from VA, was born again at a camp-meeting, became a Methodist, and sensed God's call to minister on the Wyandot Indian reservation in OH. There he met Jonathan Pointer, a prisoner of the Wyandots since his youth. The combination of Stewart's preaching and Pointer's interpretation led to a very successful ministry among the Wyandot tribe. So successful was this cross-cultural ministry that Stewart was licensed to preach by the Methodists. The Methodist Episcopal Church formed its official missionary society in 1819, but John

Stewart's ministry among the Wyandot tribe can be considered the actual start of Methodist missions. John Stewart was an African-American.

In 1823, Betsy Stockton applied to an American Mission Board, and was assigned to Hawaii. Prior to launching, she had served in the household of the President of Princeton College, and had used her time in the household to read widely from the household's extensive library. On launching to Hawaii, she served initially as a domestic assistant, but soon graduated to running a school – a task for which she was eminently well qualified. She is the first single American lady to serve as a cross-cultural missionary. She was an African-American.

It is true that in the later 1800s, the massive growth of independent African-American churches across the USA tended to “suck in” all the available African-American Gospel workers who may otherwise have continued the pioneering path laid out by the African-American missionaries of the 1700s – mid-1840s. However, no history of Protestant missions from and within the USA is complete without recognizing the pioneering, courageous and indefatigable path blazed by many courageous African-American disciples of Jesus Christ who had the grace to overcome incredible obstacles, racist structures and individuals, to demonstrate the love of God around the world.

The Apostle Paul has very significant counsel in this regard:

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart” (Hebrews 12:1-3).

We pay paraphrase v. 3 as follows: “Consider those who endured such hostility against themselves from nominal believers, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.”

Let us run the race that is set before us then, considering in humility the examples of those African-American missionaries who have trod the path of sacrificial service before us, in the face of almost insuperable difficulties, and may our ministry be as fragrant an offering to our Heavenly Father as was theirs.

Have a blessed Sabbath,

Conrad.