



# Jesus and Justice

How the Methodist tradition holds together evangelistic piety and social justice advocacy

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+ For the last century or so, United Methodists (and members of other American churches) have been stuck in a polarized and divided religious environment, in which various Christians champion either a personal gospel of evangelism and discipleship **or** a social gospel of justice advocacy.

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- + This false dichotomy is neither scriptural nor true to the Wesleyan heritage. Many eighteenth and nineteenth century Methodists kept Jesus and justice together, due to their convictions about sanctification: We can do the same!

# Let's start with John Wesley

- + John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, emphasized that every person has been given the opportunity to receive God's free grace and to experience a "new birth" in Christ—a conversion to "real Christianity," rather than being stuck in a "dead" expression of religious formalism.
- + This distinction between nominal or "professing" faith and genuine or "real" faith was important for Wesley.

## **For Wesley, “real Christianity” is evident in people’s lives in two ways:**

- + 1) “a perceptible testimony of God’s Spirit that a person is a child of God.” Christ wants to give everyone the *experience of God’s presence* in their lives.
- + 2) *A sanctified/holy lifestyle*. “A real Christian...should deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Jesus.”

# 1) “A perceptible testimony of God’s Spirit” that we are children of God.

- + Wesley’s “real Christianity”—the Methodist message—is both **evangelistic** (sharing Jesus with other people, so that they can be renewed in faith) and **pietistic** (stressing the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Scripture-study, and small groups for mutual accountability).

## 2) “A real Christian should deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Jesus.”

- + Wesley didn't stop with his emphases on evangelism and piety. He also stressed **sanctification**—the belief that God desires all people to **grow in holiness**, that is, that everyone can become more Christ-like in
- + Francis Asbury, the first American bishop, said: “Real religion is real holiness.”

# A holy life

+ Wesley believed that the holy life of a “real Christian” would be demonstrated by specific holy behaviors that illustrated loving God and loving neighbor (Jesus and justice), such as:

- 1) **Practicing spiritual disciplines** (“the means of grace”).
- 2) **Sharing your faith** with other people (evangelism).
- 3) **Being anti-slavery/anti-racist.** God doesn’t tolerate people getting rich from other people’s toil or the demeaning another person’s humanity.
- 4) **Supporting women in leadership.** The Holy Spirit empowers everyone into a vocation (calling). Women can be preachers and leaders.
- 5) **Being against hard liquor.** Why? Because alcohol abuse affects women and children the most, and money spent on alcohol consumption often makes poor people even poorer.



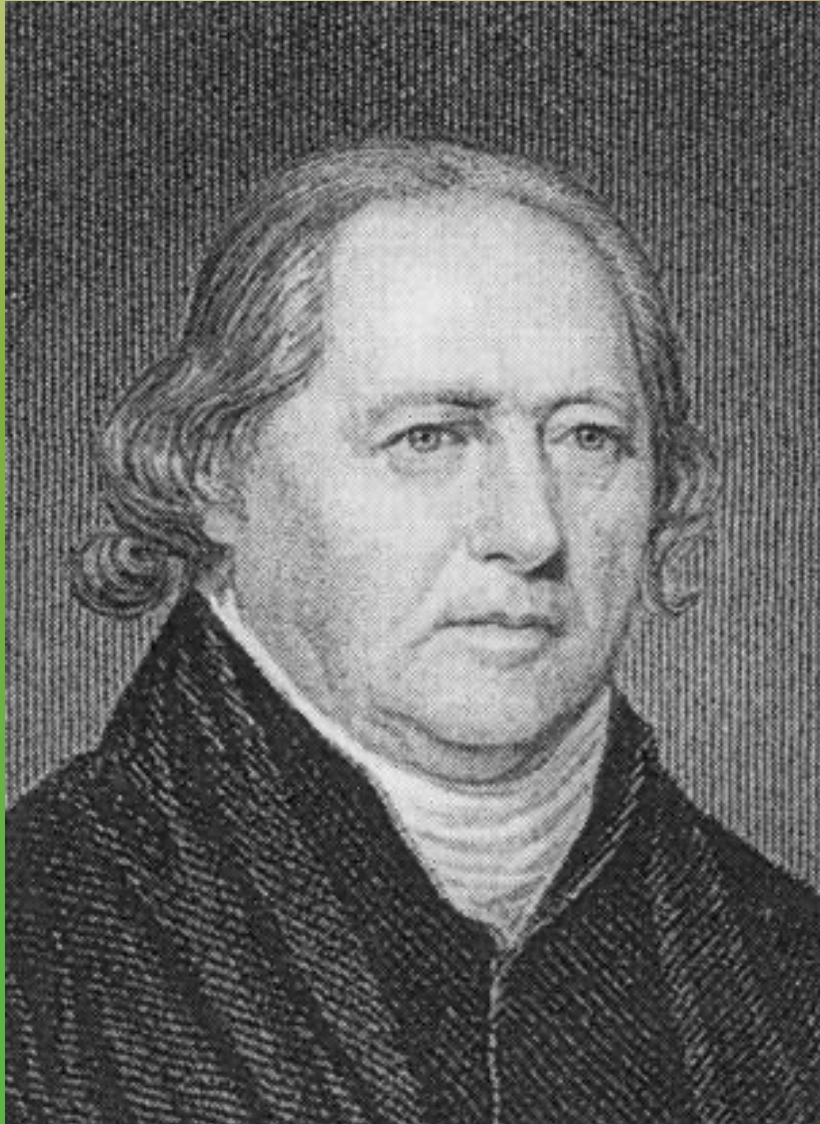
# Charles Wesley's hymns combine Jesus and justice.

+ John Wesley's brother, Charles, wrote hymn lyrics about living a holy life for the benefit of social transformation:

*"To serve the present age, my calling to fulfill. O may it all my powers engage, to do my Master's will." [UMH 413]*

# **Early American Methodists reflected Wesley's theology in their behavior**

- + Wesley's message of evangelistic and pietistic new birth and justice-oriented sanctification spread to America.
- + The original "class meetings" (small groups), in New Windsor, Md. and in New York City, were biracial. White and black Methodists fellowshiped together.
- + No Methodist could be a slaveholder. Some women were preachers. Alcohol was forbidden.



**One example  
of the  
Methodist  
combination of  
Jesus & justice:  
Freeborn  
Garrettson**

# Garrettson's life

- + Garrettson was born to an aristocratic slave-owning family in Harford County, Maryland.
- + He heard Methodist preachers such as Robert Strawbridge and Francis Asbury, and was converted to saving faith.
- + Despite his conversion, Garrettson's soul was heavy. He heard a voice from God: "It is not right for you to keep your fellow creatures in bondage; you must let the oppressed go free."

# **“At liberty”**

- + At the very moment that Garrettson emancipated the people whom he and his family had enslaved, he felt “at liberty” to experience the joy of his salvation.
- + Garrettson became a famous Methodist preacher (second only to Francis Asbury), and spread a message of salvation and anti-slavery all over the eastern U.S.
- + Garrettson was jailed in Cambridge, Md., for preaching against slavery.

# **Garrettson wrote an anti-slavery tract in the form of a fictional allegory: “A Dialogue Between Do-Justice and Professing Christian” (1810)**

- + In Garrettson’s story, an abolitionist named “Do-Justice” confronts a slaveowner named “Professing Christian” and asks him to examine his life in order to determine if Professing Christian actually has saving faith.
- + Do-Justice states that *enslaving other people indicates that a person is enslaved to sin*, and negates the possibility of living a holy life.
- + At the end of the story, “Professing Christian” frees the enslaved people. He becomes an abolitionist and his name changes to “Real Christian.”

**The Methodist message is that *anyone* can become a “real Christian”—a message that appealed to many Americans.**



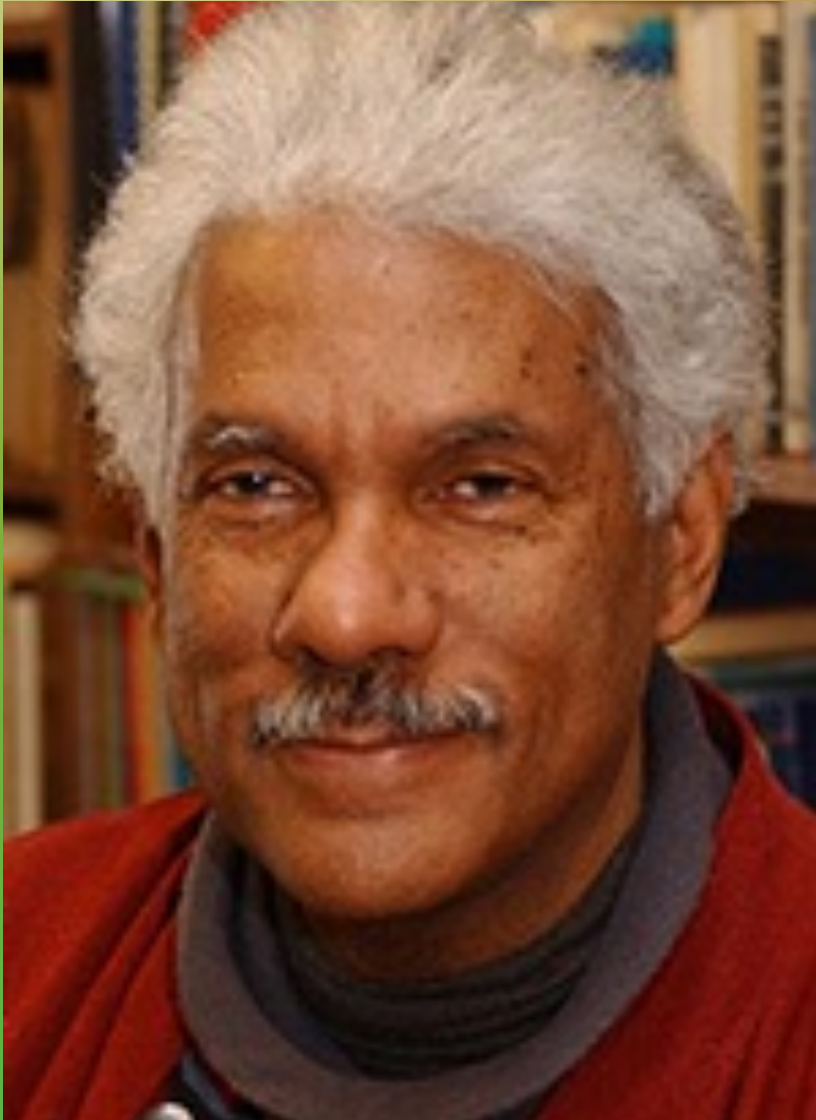
# **Methodists preached from scriptural texts which teach that God's free grace is experientially available to everyone.**

- + "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."  
Romans 3.23
- + "The Lord does not anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." 2 Peter 3.9
- + "Welcome one another, then, just as Christ welcomed you, to God's glory." Romans 15.7



# **African Americans were especially drawn to Methodist revivalism**

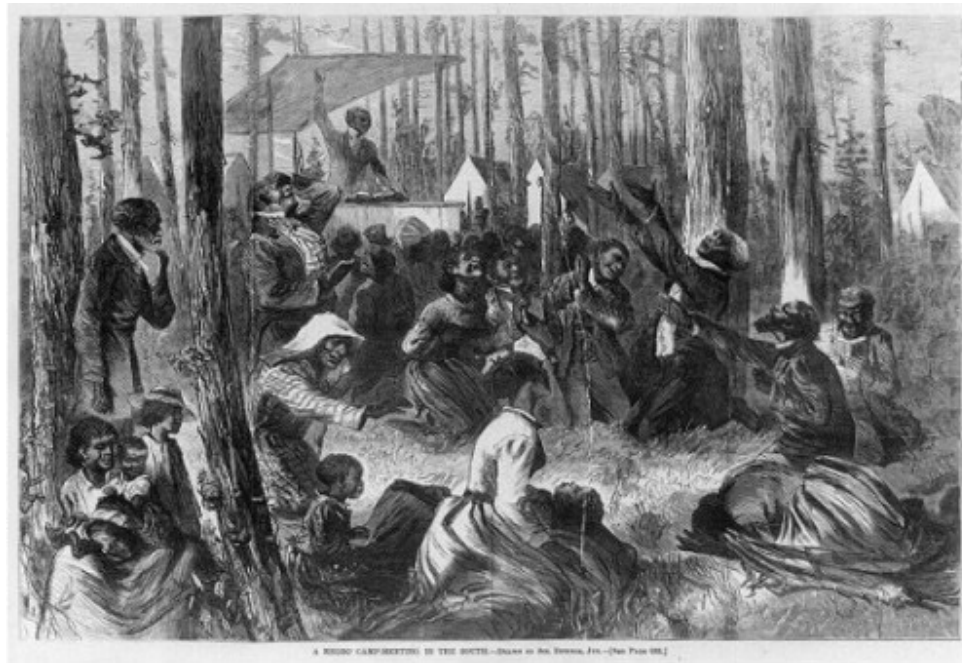
- + If all have sinned, then all people—White as well as Black—are sinful.
- + If the Lord wants all people to come to salvation, and welcomes all, then all people—Black as well as White—are loved by God and affirmed by God.



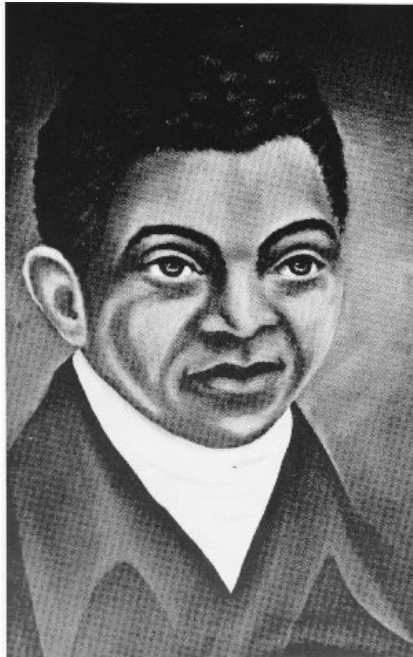
**Princeton University historian Dr. Albert J. Raboteau writes about the conversion of 19<sup>th</sup> century African Americans**

**“The egalitarian tendency of evangelical revivals to level the souls of all people before God had been one of the major attractions to Black converts.... Racial and social status was overturned in the close communion.... Blacks were impressed by this gospel of freedom.”**

# **African American preachers spread the revivalist Methodist message of Jesus and justice at camp meetings**



**Some famous 19<sup>th</sup> century African  
American Methodist preachers: Harry  
Hosier, Jarena Lee, Richard Allen**



# **African American Methodists kept Jesus and justice together**

+ "Because they converted, churched, and pastored themselves, Blacks were able to deny, in effect, that Christianity was a white religion."

Albert J. Raboteau, "The Black Experience in American Evangelicalism," pp. 183-184.



**Another example of combining Jesus and justice: Black and White Methodists worked together on the Underground Railroad:**

**Jermain Wesley Loguen, Bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church**





**Another example of combining Jesus and justice: Black and White Methodists worked together on the Underground Railroad:**

**Luther Lee, a founder of the Wesleyan Methodist Church and the preacher at the ordination of the first woman to be ordained**

**The Wesleyan/Methodist message balances pietistic and evangelistic devotion to Jesus with a prophetic proclamation of justice, and it did so in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.**



- + The Wesleyan balance of Jesus and justice fell apart in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, due to the split between a personal gospel and a social gospel. Methodist Christians felt the need to choose one or the other: either one could be devoted to a personal faith in Christ, or one could be a proclaimer of God's justice, but not both.

# **We can restore the Methodist theological heritage of Jesus and justice.**

- + By preaching Wesley's message of "real Christianity":
  - 1) The new birth in Christ, which transforms people to experience the Holy Spirit's presence in their lives.
  - 2) The sanctifying work of God that can empower us to live a holy life.



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