Matthew HENRY

*October 18, 1662 - June 22, 1714*

Matthew Henry was born less than two months after the “great ejection” - October 1662. His father was a Puritan pastor who was put out of his pulpit in the ejection - one of the darkest hours in England. Soon the great plague & the great fire of London occurred in [Lawson’s thinking] as God’s judgment for persecution against Puritans.

1. Matthew became the greatest Puritan expositor and commentary writer of the entire Bible. It is one of the leading commentaries even today. Never been out of print. This indicates how rooted & grounded he was in the word of God. “Bibline” like Bunyan.
2. He is one of the greatest preachers of the English language were you to ask Lawson. He would include Charles Haddon Spurgeon, George Whitfield and Jonathan Edwards in this group. It was the testimony of Edwards, Whitfield, and Spurgeon that the writings of Matthew Henry and his commentaries were one of the greatest influences that shaped their preaching. I.e. Jonathan Edwards “blank Bible”. George Whitfield at conversion at age 21, the very 1ST commentary he bought was Henry’s commentary; same can be said of John & Charles Wesley.
3. Matthew was born in North Wales. His father was Oxford trained and educated. God would use this in Matthew’s life. When his father‘s ministry was taken away from him, his dad poured his life into his son through daily AM/PM devotions and worship in the family home. Instruction from the Word by dad. Their home was a little church. His father started to hire brilliant men who were well trained and taught. He “catechized” his children in the Westminster confession of faith, both large and small. As a young teenager, he was asked to lead these family devotionals. From this we learn that God is always “previous”, Eph 2:10.
4. In the house during family devotions with his father preaching on Ps 51:17 [a broken spirit, a broken & contrite heart, O God you will not despise] the arrow that was shot from the bow of heaven into the target of Matthew Henry’s heart. He was 13 years of age. Matthew, “I give you thanks that I am yours and will be yours”.
5. **EDUCATED STUDENT, 1680-1686**. Because of Charles the 2ND, the doors were closed for Matthew to go to Oxford or to Cambridge or to some other seminary where he would be well instructed. So his father sends him to an underground, unlicensed, unlawful school meeting in the shadows of London. It was led by Thomas Doolittle in 1680, who studied under Richard Baxter. He became seriously ill when he arrives. His own life was threatened. Near brush with death. So weak, he has to return home. The pulpit is closed to him so he can’t enter the ministry. His dad and his dad’s peers advised him to go into law, and he did this. He attended Grays in Square Inn London, 1685. On a break from law school, Matthew returns home and his father has been arrested & imprisoned in a castle. Represents the danger of the hour in which he was brought up. His father was not even in the ministry anymore. He was arrested under suspicion that he was manipulating things in the governmental attitudes of the day.
6. Matthew Henry decides to stay at home with his mom and siblings. It’s deepening his convictions of what is right and wrong. He returns to law school, but he has a lingering desire to preach and to pastor the Church. Returns to his home. Close connection with his parents. He was told that the laws may be changing, a season a peace may be forthcoming. So, he decides to test the waters. He made himself available to preach. He was invited to preach near his parents’ home. As he preached, he felt the pleasure of God within his soul. This awakened within him an even greater desire to move forward with the ministry. They called him to be their pastor. He said yes but wanted to return to finish law school. He wrapped up his schooling in law. Some leading Presbyterian ministers serving behind the scenes, came together to ordain him on May 9, 1687. We learned from this that the doors are open by faith, doors which may be closed to us today, but opened tomorrow. That same year The Declaration Of Indulgence was passed which suspended the penalties for failing to conform to the Church of England. He marries Katheryn Hardware.
7. **A HEARTBROKEN SOUL: 1687-1699**. Puritans suffered much death. With their own siblings, spouses & their own children. [I.e., John Owen’s 11 children, and his wife died.] It was a way of life in the 1600s. With every hammer blow of these afflictions, Matthew Henry is being shaped and molded into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is continuing to be one with a broken and contrite heart. The one who is humbled will himself be exalted and vice a versa.  The death of his wife, Katheryn, occurred upon the birth of their 1ST child, 1687. Henry states, “I know nothing that could support me under such a loss as this but the good hope that she has gone to heaven and that in a little while I shall follow her.” In 1690, he remarries Mary Warburton, and begins to keep a diary. He wanted to review each day that he lived at the end of that day. His concern: to glorify God, he cannot waste his time [like Edwards]. If I lose time, I will not be able to glorify God. Used diary to monitor his time. In 1691 his second wife gave birth to a daughter, Elizabeth, but she developed the whooping cough and died at age 1. Matthew states, “I desire to leave her in the arms of Him who gave her to me. The will of God be done”. Like Job, he blessed God while humbling himself in His presence. “The Lord gives and takes away, blessed be the name of Lord. In all this Job did not sin against God.” Commitment to the sovereignty of God. Three years later they have a 2ND daughter, Mary, but after three weeks she died. He preached her funeral from Job 38. Matthew states, “Infants are not born in vain but to help to populate the new Jerusalem.” A 3RD daughter is born, Esther, and a 4TH daughter who contracted measles and died. He states, “I am in death often, Lord teach me how to die daily.” God was at the center. of his worldview. Then his father Phillip died. “This should bring me nearer to God and make me live more upon God who is the fountain of living waters. My dear father was a counselor to me for Christ is the wonderful counselor. He was an intercessor for me, my father, but Christ is my intercessor who lives forever.” Always taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Two sisters died, Eleanor and Ann. Writes in his diary, “I find it hard to submit. Let the grace of Christ be sufficient for me. I have said it, let your will be done but let me not unsay it. Extraordinary afflictions are not always the punishment of extraordinary sin”.
8. **FAITHFUL SHEPHERD: 1700-1706** – Finally a time of calm entered his life. He receives a son, Philip, named for his own father and his wife gives birth to four more daughters. Matthew’s ministry begins to prosper. They end up purchasing land. They can meet publicly now. The chapel could not contain the people. They add a gallery. The church grows to the “staggering” size of 350 members. Some of God’s greatest preachers only pastored a relatively small flock. One would think that he would be pastoring 10,000 people. Matthew interpreted, exhorted, and applied the Scriptures. Exegetical and biblical yet he was also practical and pastoral. Standing between two worlds. The ancient text on one hand, and. on the other hand, the flock. He related the truth of the Word of God to the people of God right where they lived. He never released his grip on the two worlds. He saw himself standing between these two worlds. A merger of two churches took place. Members of the merger weren’t used to biblical preaching which brought many challenges and difficulties for Matthew Henry which was part of the refining process in his life, the purging of the heart, removing the self-sufficiency. Every thorn in the flesh is intended by Him to weaken us so that God’s grace and strength will be made strong in our lives. He preached almost every day of the week. Invitations increased. By horseback from town to town. He never wanted to decline an invitation. Saw it as God’s beckoning call to his life’s ministry. He declined many opportunities to take the pastorate in other churches [except toward the end of his life, see below]. He didn’t want to be someone in the eyes of people. He wanted humbly to serve where God had placed him.
9. **THE POPULAR EXPOSITOR**: Begins to write his commentaries while he is in the pulpit. Starting in 1704, a 10 year project. So regimented with his time that he begins with Genesis. Henry was like a machine cranking these out. There were substantial volumes with very practical maxims. 1710, he wrote A Method For Prayer. He took the Lord’s prayer and taught his readers how to pray. In 1711, he accepted an invitation from a church in London. He wrote out nine reasons why he believed this was God’s will for him. He goes to them with only two years to live -1712-1714. Less than 100 members. Church in Hackney, England. It was almost 1/4 of the size of what he had been pastoring. His heart never left Chester, England. Lawson describes Matthew Henry’s beautiful writing style.
10. **TIRING LABORER: 1714** He returned home to Chester to preach. He preached his way through England as he’s traveling to Chester. Riding by horse. Rained in the dark. The horse stumbles and Matthew Henry falls off the horse with severe bodily harm to himself. Taken to a farmhouse. He dies in 1714 in this farmhouse. He died at age 52 years old. He only got through the book of Acts with his commentary. 13 pastors took his sermon notes which were so rich and plentiful. They wrote Romans to Revelation from his collected notes.
11. We all have to be about the work for the souls of men on behalf of God. We all play different roles. How are you being used by God to extend the ministry of the Word of God? On the last day what really matters is that the Word of God found a place in the hearts of people and extended God’s kingdom.