

It's Revival We Need!

by C. William Fisher

We need revival to maintain our doctrines, standards, and evangelism, and to experience spiritual renewal.

Scripture: Psalm 85:6, Proverbs 4:23, Joel 2:28, Acts 3:19, Romans 12:2, Ephesians 5:14, 2 Timothy 1:6, James 4:8, Revelation 2:4

Topics: "Church Revival", "Holy Spirit"

Description

C. William Fisher preaches on the urgent need for revival in maintaining doctrines, standards, and effective evangelism in the Church of the Nazarene. He emphasizes that revival starts in the heart, leading to a renewed commitment to the core beliefs of the church. Fisher warns against the dangers of losing passion for holiness and evangelism, stressing the importance of a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit to revitalize the church's mission and effectiveness.

Transcript

If revival is renewal of right relationship with God and man, if revival is quickening of the Spirit in the hearts of Christians, if revival is replenishing the passion for the lost, if revival is

refreshing from the Lord -- then what need could possibly be more urgent than the need for revival?

1. We need revival to maintain our doctrines.

When our hearts are warm, there is a definite intensity in the way we feel about the things we say we believe. When there is a decline in piety, in warmth, in devotion, there is a corresponding decline in emphasis upon doctrine.

Something always happens in the heart first before it happens in the head. For with the heart man believes. If there is a leakage of love from the heart, there will be a loss of commitment to the doctrine. The real reason some Nazarenes are not as committed to the doctrines of the church as once they were is not that they have more in their heads but that they have less in their hearts.

Some Nazarenes whose parents and grandparents paid a terrific price for their beliefs are willing to sell those beliefs today for the cheap pottage of popularity and social respectability. Some Nazarenes whose parents suffered persecution for their beliefs are not even willing to suffer embarrassment over their own. It isn't that we have outgrown our doctrines; it is simply that some of us have grown too soft and flabby of hand and soul to hold on to them.

A preacher who was once wonderfully used of God in the Church of the Nazarene is today out of the ministry completely and it is because he no longer believes the doctrines he once believed and preached. He not only does not believe in holiness, or in crisis conversion, or in the deity of Christ -- he makes fun of those who do. His decline in faith and effectiveness corresponded with his decline in devotion. When his heart cooled towards Christ, his commitment cooled towards the doctrines of the church.

Dr. Donald Metz warned of just such a tragedy when he wrote in the Preacher's Magazine for May-June of 1950 under the title "Prophet, Priest, or Promoter." "The most tragic thing that can happen to a preacher," said Dr. Metz, "is gradually to lose the prophetic fire, to drift into formalism, and then swing into a religious huckster with nothing to sell except himself and his own cheap personality. He becomes a promoter and politician. The message of salvation is merely a screen to camouflage his selfish aspirations for an easy and profitable way of life."

James Burns, in his book on Revivals, warned of the same dilution and distortion when he said, "Every revival, when it appears, discovers to the church its spiritual decay, its worldliness, and the insincerity of its witness ... The first tendency [of this spiritual decay] is for the doctrine of the church to lose its power of converting the conscience, convincing the mind, or moving the heart." And then he continues, "In dead and unspiritual times, preachers continue to use the old words once so full of convincing and converting power, but now devitalized, partly because the age has drifted from them, partly because to those who use them they have become the mere jargon of the pulpit. They mumble out their shibboleths, but they fail to strike home to the conscience, or to gain response from the heart, for they themselves have ceased to be moved by them ... At such a time the priesthood degenerates; those who minister in holy things become worldly; the love of wealth, of ease, and of power -- the three deadly sins of those who occupy this high vocation --

appear; they give the sanction of an evil example to the worldly, and become the object of scorn to the skeptical and indifferent."

There are few sights more pathetic than to see a man -- preacher or layman -- trying to evoke an emotion he no longer feels, or repeating words he no longer believes.

We need a revival all right -- a revival of doctrinal emphasis so warm and emphatic and convincing that those Nazarenes who give lip service to the doctrines of the church but in their hearts no longer believe them will be won back to God and become so revived that these doctrines will once again become a living, radiant reality in their lives.

Cold logic will never do that. Fancy phrasing will never do it. Little snippets of Tillich or Freud or Ferre' will never do it. Any number of socials and suppers and showers will never win them back to a real commitment to the doctrine of holiness. But a revival in which men and women and young people are getting back to God and surrendering anew their lives to Christ will see a renewed commitment to the doctrines of the church. A holiness revival creates a climate in which Nazarenes can again talk about and witness to holiness without embarrassment and without apology.

May God give us more men and women and young people who are Nazarenes, not because of the size of the buildings or the popularity of the preacher or the music program or the youth program or because of family tradition or friends within the church, but because they believe 100 percent in the doctrines of the church!

That kind of total belief and commitment is not merely a matter of the head, but is primarily a matter of the heart, for the "heart has reasons that reason does not know." And when the heart is renewed and refired and revived, those reasons of the heart are given fresh force and validity and thrust. As W. A. Powers said, "The experience of holiness in the individual heart and the work of revival in the church, are closely associated. God has joined them together, and no man should attempt to put them asunder."

2. But then again, we need revivals to maintain our standards.

Dr. Timothy Smith, in his book *Called unto Holiness*, said that the early Nazarenes and their leaders "set out to produce by means both human and divine revivals of sufficient power to overcome all the attractions which a worldly life held for young people. Then, between revivals they could shelter them in church schools and youth programs from polluting contact with evil."

And this is the best safeguard ever found for the encroachments of worldliness into the lives of people of any age. Those whose hearts are freshly warmed and revived are never bothered too much by the attractions of the world. It is when a leanness comes into the soul that a person looks with longing upon the amusements and pleasures and practices of the worldly people about him.

That is why a person starts asking, "What's wrong with the dance -- or the show, or a smoke, or a social drink, or ... ?" -- and the list goes on and on. When any person find himself

beginning to ask such questions he should immediately get on his knees and move up close to Christ and allow the Holy Spirit to come afresh upon his soul. If he does, those questions will fade away.

I have stood many times replying to questions that had been written on slips of paper, and invariably the majority of those questions dealt with worldly amusements or pleasures. And invariably those putting up the strongest defense for those things were those who were "out at the edge" spiritually. Spiritual people, young or old, do not find the things of the world alluring. It is when the realities begin to slip, when the fervor dies down, when the vision of Christ gets dim, when the heart gets cold, when the devotional life is neglected, when the things of God no longer have a pull and tug at the heart -- then it is that people begin to ask, "What's wrong with ... ?" or to say, "Well, I don't see anything wrong with that."

We may perhaps give reasonable replies to their questions but those replies will never change their basic desires. Our replies may satisfy their minds, but if their hearts are cold and empty, whatever we say is not going to make much difference. It is the heart that needs to be satisfied -- and only Christ can do that.

There are those who think that this problem of worldliness is an instructional problem, but it is basically a spiritual problem. Replies to honest questions are always in order and can be helpful. But if we spent half the time praying with those with the questions as we do trying to answer their questions with our fancy arguments, suggesting that, well, the Manual doesn't mean "exactly" that, we would have less problems and fewer people seeing how near to the world they can get instead of how near to Christ they can live.

Worldliness is never solved by instruction; it is never solved by advice; it is never solved by compromise. The problem of worldliness is solved only in the heart. When the heart is right there is no problem. To tell a person he has to quit this or that because the church says so, or because it's in the Manual, usually leaves him cold. There's no romance to that. But to pray with a person until he really prays through to a vital relationship with Christ, until he has fallen in love with Christ, and Christ has become real in his life -- there is thrill to that. There is romance in that. And as that love grows in the heart, his attitude will be that Christ

means more to him than the things of the world ever meant and he won't spend his time, or other people's time, asking, "What's wrong with that?" He will be too busy singing, "Take this world with all its pleasures; take them, take them, one and all. Give me Christ, my blessed Saviour; He is sweeter than them all."

Christ and Christ alone is the Antidote to worldliness. And with the intense and manifold pressures of a secular age constantly crowding us, constantly probing for our weaknesses, constantly tempting us -- how desperately we need those times of refreshing from the Lord, those times of renewal of commitment, those times of revival!

May God give us more men and women and young people who will turn a deaf ear to the smooth voices or siren songs of the world, not because the Manual says so, or because their companions say so, or because their parents say so, or because the church says so -- but because their hearts are so warmed by His presence and the thrill of His will is so real that the attractions of the world no longer allure them, no longer bother them, no longer even interest them.

If revival means renewal of relationship and commitment, if it means a fresh vision of Christ and how wonderful life can be if lived in His will, if it means reinforcing the reasons of the heart -- then holiness revivals are absolutely necessary if we expect to maintain our holiness standards.

3. But most important of all, we need revival if our evangelism is to be effective and spiritually productive.

The Church of the Nazarene was born in the fires of revival. But we can die in the smoke of evangelism -- the smoke of an educational evangelism that knows no heart passion, the smoke of a visitation evangelism that is nothing but recruitment for church members. We can die in the smoke of a passionless, powerless evangelism that requires no tears, no agony, no sweat -- and sees no conviction, no repentance, no restitution -- and hears no shouts of the newborn or the fully sanctified.

Without revival, the very word evangelism is drained of its ruggedness, its vigor, its historic meaning.

Religious leaders talk about "evangelism" being their "main business" still, but what does that kind of "evangelism" mean? The word is still spelled the same; it still sounds the same; but is it the same? Would Wesley recognize it as "evangelism"? Would Asbury? Would Bresee? Would H. C. Morrison? Do we?

The Communists take words like liberty and freedom and democracy, suck all the meaning out of them, pump in their half-truths, their distortions, their denials, and then go on pronouncing and proclaiming the words. But those words no longer mean what once they meant. They are still spelled the same; they still look the same and are pronounced the same -- but they no longer mean the same.

And so it is with religious words like revival and evangelism. There are those who drain all the vitality out of the word revival until it means nothing more than a preaching mission or convention. There are those who suck all the spiritual meaning out of the word evangelism until it means nothing more than visitation, recruitment for Sunday school or church members, religious exercises that have no spiritual value or meaning or challenge whatever. They can say, as one pastor said, "Everything we do is of evangelizing significance." Since that church sponsored dances and movies and bridge and pool parties, they would undoubtedly consider those activities of "evangelizing significance."

As mentioned earlier, "Evangelism, on its way from Jerusalem to Jericho, has been beaten and robbed and left half dead." And I submit that some Samaritan or some Nazarene or someone needs to rescue the word, and wipe off the mud that has been slung on it in derision, and bind up the wounds that have been

inflicted even by its so-called friends, and take it to a prayer meeting or to a real revival some place where it can be restored to its original meaning and vigor and spiritual health.

There are those, of course, who believe that vital evangelism is out of place in intelligent and sophisticated circles; so instead of paying a revival price to meet the demands of the word, they cheapen the word and drag it down to the level of their own pseudo intellectualism and stifling formalism. It is W. E. Sangster who said, "The snobbish idea spread that culture and hot evangelism did not go together -- and Methodists were terribly anxious to be known as cultured." Could the word be changed to "Nazarene" without affecting the meaning? "The recurring sin of the Christian Church," Sangster continues, "is to leave her evangelism to those whose gifts are of the heart, rather than the head, and God, in His longing to redeem, makes use of whoever He can. But what mighty things He does when He has both! All the great figures in the evangelical succession -- Paul, Augustine, Luther, and Wesley -- were intellectuals, and three of them had spent years in lecturing. There is no necessary divorce between a keen mind and a hot gospel."

And yet there are Nazarenes, here and there, who apparently feel that warm-hearted evangelism is not compatible with their blinding brilliance. A young preacher once wrote Dr. Chapman that, since he was of the intellectual type instead of the emotional type, he found it difficult to prepare and deliver evangelistic sermons. I appreciated Dr. Chapman even more when he answered that young preacher in the pages of the Preacher's Magazine by saying that there was no conflict between real intellect and evangelism and that he himself always found it easier to be evangelistic when he had experienced a fresh movement of God's Spirit upon his own heart.

Was Paul deficient in intellect? -- and yet he burned his way across his world with the fire of his evangelistic zeal.

Was Wesley deficient in intellect? -- and yet he saved England from revolution with his evangelistic preaching and passion and gave to the world a church that for many years was a marvelously effective redemptive agency.

Was Finney intellectually deficient? -- and yet he changed the moral climate of entire cities by the passion of his evangelism.

Was Bresee intellectually deficient? -- and yet his evangelistic zeal made his wooden tabernacle in Los Angeles a "glory barn" filled with the Shekinah of God's presence, and out of that revivalistic fire the Church of the Nazarene was born.

Was Dr. R. T. Williams intellectually deficient? -- and yet my first recollection of him is in a revival service he conducted, and the impression is still vivid of seeing him standing there at the edge of the platform giving the altar call and with tears running freely down his face pleading with men and women to come to Christ. He was more than an ecclesiastic; he was an evangelist.

Was Dr. J. B. Chapman intellectually deficient? -- and yet, read again his articles, his books, his editorials and feel the throb of evangelistic passion that pulsed through all his works -- and look again at him stand in Kansas City before the assembled leaders of the church and sob out of a heart of evangelistic concern: "All out for souls!"

Let's have done with all these self-appointed "geniuses" who look down from the lofty heights of a sterile ministry and imply that revival passion and evangelistic zeal are a little beneath their brilliance and dignity

and that the ability to give an altar call is God's gift to the handicapped.

Their attitude and their snide remarks are no reflection upon the validity of real evangelism; they are but reflections upon the paucity of their own thinking and the coldness of their own hearts. Let them sputter out their cynicisms in those religious groups that are too cold to care and too dead to object, but as Nazarenes still committed to vital holiness evangelism, let us let them know we are too busy to listen to their cutting witticisms or to be affected by their cynical criticisms.

In his book *Evangelism in the Home Church*, Andrew W. Blackwood warns of the drift away from revival and evangelism by calling attention to the fact that when Henry Ward Beecher delivered the first three series of the Lyman Beecher Lectures on preaching at Yale he devoted considerable time to the subject of revivals. Later speakers spoke of evangelism. But still later the emphasis was upon social problems, and since 1918 there has been little emphasis upon evangelism in the lectures.

This same pattern of drift and dilution can be observed, not only in successive generations, but in individual churches and in individual lives. Whenever the talk is more on evangelism than on revival -- watch out! -- the drift is on. Whenever revival is neglected, evangelism becomes impotent and marginal, and the final result is a loss of mission and effectiveness and, as one said, instead of the children being willing to dig out the old wells, they go wild-cattling in all sorts of strange places and ways to try to recover the old power and the old effectiveness. Churches, like people, do not lose their passion or their mission by revolution but by dilution.

Instead of "wild-cattling" for new methods and new gimmicks, isn't it time we were willing to pay the price to dig out the wells of real revival until they begin gushing again with the streams of vital and effective evangelism?

Even the reports of our "successes" should drive us to our knees in prayer for real revival.

When there is a district in the Church of the Nazarene that had nineteen churches last year which reported not one member taken in on profession of faith -- isn't it time for revival?

When there is another district in which eighteen of its churches did not take in one member last year on profession of faith -- isn't it time for revival?

When on still another district twenty-four churches did not take in one member on profession of faith last year -- isn't it time for revival?

When on another district of over sixty churches, nineteen of those churches did not have a single seeker at their altars all one year -- isn't it time for revival? And, worse still, when thirteen of those churches did not even attempt to have a revival all that year -- isn't it time for revival?

When in one of our larger cities we have two fewer churches than we had ten years ago, and the total gain in membership in that ten-year period is exactly fifty-seven -- isn't it time for revival?

When in a church of over four hundred Sunday school attendance there were fifteen Sunday school teachers who did not attend a single week-night revival service -- isn't it time for revival?

When in one of our fastest growing states the population growth over the past ten years has been 46 percent while the increase in Nazarene church membership has been only 42 percent -- isn't it time for

revival?

When the growth rate of the Church of the Nazarene for 1965 was 1.88 percent while the world population increase was 2.2 percent -- isn't it time for revival?

Isn't it time that we listened more carefully to E. Stanley Jones as he says, "Before we can go farther, we must first go deeper"? We have gone about as far as we're going to go on the momentum of the original thrust. What we do evangelistically from here on in we will have to pay the price for out of our own blood and tears and sweat. And the price for effective evangelism, for any church, is revival.

Surveying the future as best he could, John Wesley said, "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist in Europe and America, but I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect having the form of religion without the power."

And in 1847, Bishop Edmund S. Janes warned this same church of what might happen to their mission, in these words: "Drawing our proof from past dispensations, we say to the Methodist Church that, if she proves recreant to her important trust -- if she fails to fulfill the end for which she was raised up, 'to spread Scriptural holiness over the land' and over the world -- God will give her stewardship to another. He will raise up a people who will perform His gracious pleasure, and receive the glorious reward."

We Nazarenes believe deeply that we were raised up to be inheritors of that tradition and that commitment. Will there ever come a day when others will say that they are inheritors of our mission?

That there will cease to be a Church of the Nazarene is unthinkable. We will continue to grow. We will continue to increase in membership and finances and social prestige and denominational respectability. We will continue to speak about and emphasize evangelism. But that we may do all that and still lose our mission is not only possible and probable; it is inevitable -- unless we are willing to pay the price for a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit!

It is inevitable that we lose our mission -- unless all of us -- superintendents, pastors, evangelists, professors, laymen, all of us from center to circumference, from top to bottom -- get on our knees and ask God's forgiveness for our complacency, our pride, our insistence on seeing evangelistic results without paying revival prices, for our spending our time patting each other on the back and saying what a great job we're doing when our whole world is on its way to hell and is

already wrapped in the flames of its racial tensions, its rampant nationalism, its lust, its greed, its hatreds, its sins.

It is inevitable that we lose our mission -- unless every one of us gets on his face before God and pays the price for that measure of the Holy Spirit's power that alone will enable us to withstand the terrific pressures of a godless age and the secular sag that saps our spirituality and robs us of our vision and dilutes our message and drains away our dynamic.

It is inevitable that we lose our mission of holiness evangelism -- unless we pay the price for real Holy Ghost revival!

The phrase of this quadrennium, "In the Power of the Spirit," is more than a slogan. It is the most urgent need we have for the survival of our mission. The power of the Holy Spirit is the only adequate corrective there is to the pressures that would arrest the cleansing tides of real revival. The power of the Holy Spirit is

the only adequate corrective there is to the influence of those who would shift us from our primary emphasis and blunt the thrust of vital evangelism. The power of the Holy Spirit is the only corrective there is to the drift and dilution of our day. We can survive as a religious institution without it, but we cannot be true to our mission of holiness evangelism without it.

"To run an organization needs no God," said Samuel Chadwick. "Man can supply the energy, enterprise, and enthusiasm for things human. The real work of the church depends upon the Power of the Spirit ... The energy of the flesh cannot do the work of the Spirit."

Or listen to our founder, Dr. Bresee, as he says: "Without the manifest presence of the Holy Ghost any church is a failure. It may be a great machine, wheels within wheels, but it is without life and power. Such an organization bears the same relation to the Church of Christ that a dead body bears to the man. A dead body is organized matter; it is in the form, and has the appearance of a man, but for all purposes for which a man was created it is a useless thing. So with a church. It is organized humanity; in many respects it looks like the real thing, but for the purposes for which the Church was called into being, it is utterly useless. It may amuse, entertain, instruct men, but to lift men out of their sins and take sin out of them it is powerless to do so."

If we do not have the power of the Holy Spirit, what do we have that other churches do not have?

We have fine buildings -- so do they; we have fine choirs -- so do they; we have fine youth program -- so do they; we have promotional know-how -- so do they; we have able administrators -- so do they. If we lack, then, the power of the Holy Spirit, we are no different from any other church; we have nothing distinctive to offer; we have no excuse for existence.

And yet writers like Martin Marty speak of the Church of the Nazarene and others as the "third force," and he suggests that one of the bulwarks against what he calls "religion in general," this "watered-down peace-of-mind, success saints, adapting to your environment emphasis" is a church like the Church of the Nazarene -- "the third force penetration, who do not fit in." We are, he says, "the square pegs in the smooth round holes of the new evangelism."

If this is true, then our responsibility to pay the price for revival so that our evangelism will be vital and effective is larger than merely to save our own mission. It is to be a leading edge to the penetration of vital religion into all phases of church life in America and the world. May God in heaven help us not to fail ourselves, and others, in this day of our God-ordained opportunity in the fulfillment of our destiny!

What does a little more prestige and respect and sophistication and improved denominational image and profile have to offer against an opportunity and a destiny like that!

And what shall it profit us if we gain big buildings and big money and big success and big membership -- if we lose our mission and lose sight of our destiny!

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