

# Icabod Or Ebenezer

by Charles Price

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*This sermon emphasizes the need to turn back to the Lord with all our hearts, seeking Him and getting rid of any other objects of dependence. It contrasts the consequences of relying on symbols or idols instead of God with the power and victory that come from seeking God wholeheartedly. The message encourages confession of sin, seeking God's forgiveness, and allowing Him to fill us with His Spirit for transformation and victory.*

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## Description

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## Transcript

Our speaker this evening requires no introduction, I'm sure, but I'm going to introduce him as a fellow Welshman. Charles Price is our guest speaker this evening from People's Church Toronto, and we're so thrilled, brother, that you came to be with us. Last year, Charles sent us a video to be used at our conference in Wales, and I've seen that video, and of course, like you, I've seen it many, many times on television, and we're just so delighted we've given him the evening, the rest of the evening, for him to speak to us about his burden for revival, wherever God has laid upon his heart.

So would you come, brother? And I'm invited Clayton Duggan and Bill Tennant, I saw you somewhere, Bill. Would you come and pray for him? Holy Father, we come before you to thank you for the anointing that you have bestowed upon Charles and those who work with him, and the effectiveness of his ministry. We just rejoice in that.

And secondly, we simply ask tonight that you would, in a powerful and strong way, speak the truth that we need to hear to each of us. In Jesus' precious name, amen. Father, we humble ourselves before you tonight.

God, we want just to say that we are longing to hear from you. We thank you for your faithful servant. Please fill him with your glory tonight.

Set him free in the Holy Spirit. And Lord, bring your word to our hearts, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen.

Amen. I think if we were to go home at this stage, many of us would have said that we had met with God. And I think in the time of singing those songs which were so from the heart and so worshipful, and even Gareth's story of the origin of this conference has had on it the sense that God is doing something fresh and real and deep.

But the biggest mistake we could make would be to make revival a topic, a subject that we try to analyze, that we dissect, that we try to be clever about, that we try to explain. And my own heart has been challenged very much in these last minutes we've been here together. Because this conference will only be worthwhile and have repercussions throughout eternity if we ourselves are open to a work of God that we may not have expected when we came in here tonight.

It's not a work that's orchestrated or manipulated, but a work of simply letting God be God in our own hearts, in our own lives. My own spiritual history was born in revival. My great-grandfather was a farmer in South Wales.

He was a godless man by all accounts. And in 1904, God visited Wales in a marvelous way. A hundred thousand people were converted in 10 weeks at the peak of the Welsh revival.

There isn't one explanation for that. Evan Roberts was the primary instrument in those early days, but not the sole instrument. And my great-grandfather, along with others, mocked the revival, saw it as some kind of religious fanaticism.

And one night he went down to the local pub, bar, where he would apparently go from time to time, perhaps regularly, to meet with friends and drink. And nobody has a record of what happened in that pub that night other than God was there. And he was converted.

He came home, woke up his wife, my great-grandfather, my great-grandmother rather. That would have been before the times. She thought he was drunk.

He told her he'd become a Christian. That only confirmed that he was drunk. But he woke up the rest of his family, including my grandfather, who was then in his early 20s.

And within the next day or two, I'm not sure how long altogether, the whole family had come to Christ. So, my own spiritual legacy began in a time of revival in a pub, where God was working in such marvelous ways that people were just crying out to God for mercy. And that's what they're crying out to God for.

They weren't asking God for a good life. They were asking for mercy, for forgiveness, for cleansing. We're so often in danger of turning Jesus Christ into our preferred helper, a great physician, a great psychologist, a great provider.

But that isn't who he is. He's a Savior. Not just from the guilt and consequence of our sin.

Of course, that is where his saving work begins. But from the power and the grip of our sin. And when we make Jesus anything other than primarily a Savior, and that salvation in its fullness involves his filling us with his Holy Spirit, involves his lordship in our lives.

But it might leave you sick. It might leave you poor. It might leave you in trouble.

And if that was our theme tonight, I'll give you lots of evidence of that in Scripture. And Evan Roberts' message was summed up in four parts. And this message had that impact.

Why it was so for such a short a time? Only God in his sovereignty knows that. Though the repercussions of that revival went all over the world. There's a church in Toronto.

We celebrated the 1904 revival in 2004, the 100th anniversary. We invited a team from Wales who came and spent a Sunday with us. And we had a wonderful day.

We came very close to that sense of something very unusual happening. And we invited the Welsh church in Toronto to join us. And they did because it was a nice for them cultural exercise.

They're led by a man who doesn't believe the word of God. But the church was born in 1906 by Welsh migrants who brought with them the revival. But Evan Roberts' four parts were number one, confess all known sin.

Number two, deal with and get rid of anything that's doubtful in your life. You may not know if it's wrong or not. If it's doubtful, said Roberts, get rid of it.

Be ready to obey the Holy Spirit instantly was his third point. And fourthly, confess Christ publicly. I was in Wales two months ago to speak at the Cardiff Men's Convention, which is an annual event that draws a big crowd of men from all over Wales.

And I got hold of an old book that I hold together with an elastic band because it really is divided. Published in 1906, Evan Roberts, the great Welsh revivalist and his work, written in an old style with appendix that list the towns and villages and the numbers of people who came to Christ in those towns and villages. And I read this on the flight from London back to Toronto, eight-hour flight, and I read almost the entire book, stopping many times to pray, and to wipe my eyes at the wonder of what God did.

So recently in world history, I began to preach when I was 16 years of age. I'd been a Christian for four years, and I tried hard to live the Christian life for four years, and I discovered I can't live the Christian life. Only Jesus Christ can.

And the Christian life was not me living for him. It was he living in and through me. It was not me serving him.

Jesus said, I don't want servants. I came not to be served. You ever noticed he said that? He wants people who make themselves available for him to work in and through them.

And with a friend, we started to go to the coffee bar and try and reach young people who used to hang out in coffee bars. I lived then in Hereford, which is on the English side of the Welsh border, or in Herefordshire. And then we started to preach on the streets.

We got permission on Saturday afternoons, and one day a lady walked by, and she came from a little Welsh village just across the border. She said, we have a small church, and we don't have many people there, and we would love if you young men would come and take a service for us on a Sunday night. Sunday night was the main time when they met.

We said we'd love to. We went down to this village, had a church, many seats. In the aftermath of the revival, they built this big church.

Today, or then, there was only half a dozen people there. We began to speak in other little churches. By the time I was 17, every Sunday night, we were going into these little churches that had no pastors, a handful of people.

There was a team of four of us. We grew to six. We all went into full-time ministry eventually.

Sometimes, we'd sit on the platform. Usually, sometimes there were more of us on the platform than there were in the congregation. I remember once, there was one lady in the congregation, one lady at the organ who never left the organ.

Her back was to us, and we took it in turns to preach. We sang. We gave testimonies.

We preached. It was my turn to preach that night. I didn't know how to preach freely.

I kept to my notes, and I said, maybe there's somebody here tonight. And this poor lady, must be me, you know. But some of these buildings had almost as many seats as the population.

One village up in the Black Mountains, we went to, little village. You'd have to look hard to find it on a map. Had a chapel with a balcony, horseshoe-shaped.

Balcony hadn't been used for decades. Few people down below. And they said, we built, this chapel was built in the early 1900s with the expectancy that God will reach every person in this village.

There's as many seats in this chapel as there are people living in the village. One for everybody. It raises a big question.

Why did the revival not last? And that causes me to look more deeply into my own heart and ask the same question of myself. Why is it the times of meeting with God, times of great experience of God, times of a great consciousness of God, why do they sometimes pass? I'm going to ask you to turn in your Bible to 1 Samuel chapter four. And I hope you brought a Bible with you because the only words that'll be authoritative this week will be those that come to us from the word of God.

And you'll probably find this week that every speaker who is looking for revival stories will be looking in the Old Testament as we did this afternoon when Don McClure took us to Genesis 22. If you want to find stories of revival, you have to go to the Old Testament. If you want to find stories of evangelism, go to the New Testament.

But the Old Testament is a story of the people of God. It was the old covenant, not the new covenant. It was exclusive to the Jewish nation, the descendants of Abraham, not to the spiritual body of Christ which now is universal and comprises every nation.

But so many truths and principles are the same. These were the people of God who intended to walk with God and to enjoy God and to experience God and to be a blessed inclination. But again and again, they fail to be that.

And they fail to be that for similar reasons why the church of Jesus Christ today can be described in so many of the sad, tragic ways we heard described on the screen a few minutes ago. We've lost the plot. Or we've retained the form but lost the life.

And in 1 Samuel chapter four, I want to read you just a few verses, but keep your Bible open because I want to look at a very important story here that addresses this issue. Verse one, and in my Bible, the NIV, it is the middle of verse one. I'm going to start.

Now the Israelites went out to fight against the Philistines. The Israelites camped at Ebenezer and the Philistines at Aphek. The Philistines deployed their forces to meet Israel and as the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines who killed about 4,000 of them on the battlefield.

When the soldiers returned to the camp, the elders of Israel asked, why did the Lord bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines? And they came up with a solution. Let us bring the ark of the Lord's covenant from Shiloh so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies. So as far as I'll read for the moment, Israel is in combat with the Philistines, a ferocious little neighbor that lived on their southwestern border and whenever they appear in the Old Testament, they're fighting.

I don't know if there are any Irish people here, but I think they are the ancestors of the Irish. And in this case, Israel goes into battle. And by the way, the reason why the Israelites fight the Philistines is because God had given them territory and when they came into Canaan back in the book of Joshua, there were seven nations inhabiting Canaan.

The Philistines were not one of them. They had migrated across from Phoenicia, across to the area today just south of Gaza and in the wake of the Israelite conquering of Canaan, they came up behind them hoping in the slipstream, they would gain some advantage and get a foothold. In other words, they were out to take what God had given to Israel as their territory, their land.

And so they're not just fighting the Israelites, they're fighting the purposes of God. And they go to meet them. The Israelites go to meet them and as they do so, the Philistines beat them and kill 4,000 of them.

And so the Israelites retreat with a tail between their legs and they asked the question, the elders asked the question, why did the Lord bring defeat upon us today at the hands of the Philistines? In other words, they said, why is it that we, the people of God, who have been given this land by God, go into battle against an enemy of God and we ourselves, instead of being victorious, were beaten, thrashed, 4,000 of our men killed. What are we going to do? And this is what they decided. Let us bring, verse three, middle of verse three, let us bring the ark of the Lord's covenant from Shiloh so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies.

And let me explain what lies behind this. The ark of the covenant, as many of you will know, was the most important piece of furniture that God told Moses to build for the tabernacle. It was a rectangular box about 1.1 meters long, about 70 centimeters wide.

It wasn't huge, it was made of acacia wood, it was covered with pure gold and on top was what the King James calls the mercy seat. The NIV calls it the atonement cover, which isn't quite as romantic and one translation calls it the lid. The mercy seat is the best description.

On the top, on the lid, the mercy seat, were two cherubim with outstretched wings. The wings of the cherubim touched each other's wings, forming a sort of ark. And God said that they were to place this into the holy of holies, the inner part of the temple, and God said when he told them to consecrate the ark, there I will meet with you and there I will speak with you and there I will give you all my commandments.

That's in Exodus 25. In other words, you want to meet with God, you meet him at the ark. And once a year only, the high priest entered the holy of holies and he sprinkled the ark with blood, the blood of atonement.

And God spoke with them and they met with him. And several times when God refers to the ark of the covenant, he describes it as the place where I will meet with you. That's six times.

It isn't called the ark, the place where I meet with him. You know exactly what he's talking about. You're talking about the ark.

And so the ark represented the presence of God. That's why it was located in the holy of holies. What made the holy of holies holy was that God was there and his presence was represented by the ark of the covenant.

Now the thinking behind the suggestion was straightforward. Although the ark was kept in the holy of holies, there had been times in their history when Israel's back had been against the war and they didn't know what to do and they'd taken the ark of the covenant out of the holy of holies and they'd taken it into the situation of conflict and God had given them victory. In fact, in Numbers chapter 10 and verse 35, when they were in the wilderness, it says this, whenever the ark set out, Moses said, rise up, O Lord, may your enemies be scattered, may your foes flee before you.

It was like a liturgy that they would put the ark on the shoulders of the priests and Moses would say, rise up, O Lord, may your enemies be scattered because this ark represents the fact God is present among us and God is going to give us victory and he did. And so in their number of examples, Numbers 31, they went into battle with the Midianites and it says in verse six of Numbers 31, Moses sent them into battle, a thousand from each tribe, along with Phinehas, son of Eleazar, the priest, who took with him articles from the sanctuary and trumpets for signaling the article from the sanctuary was the ark of the covenant and they carried it into the battle with the Midianites and God gave them victory. You may remember that in Joshua chapter three, when it came time to cross the Jordan River, it says in Joshua chapter three and verse one, earlier in the morning, Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan where they camped before crossing over.

After three days, the officers went throughout the camp giving orders to the people. When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God and the priests who are Levites carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. That's the cue.

When you see the ark of the covenant on the move, on the shoulders of the priests, follow it. And verse six says, Joshua said to the priests, take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the peoples. They took it up and they went ahead of them.

Verse eight says, tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant, when you reach the edge of the Jordan's water, go and stand in the river. And in chapter four and verse 10, the next chapter it says, now the priests who carried the ark remained standing in the middle of the Jordan until everything the Lord had commanded Moses was done by the people. Just as Moses had directed Joshua, the people hurried over.

As all of them had crossed, the ark of the Lord and the priests came to the other side while the people watched. What happened was this, as they carried the ark into the Jordan river, the moment the feet of the priests carrying the ark touched the water, it stopped flowing. And you remember a path opened, they went through.

When they came to their next obstacle, which was the city of Jericho in Joshua chapter six, it says in verse three, march around the city. You probably know this story well. March around the city once with all the armed men.

Do this for six days. Have seven priests carry trumpets in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times with the priests blowing the trumpets.

And when you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout and the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, will go up every man straight in. So carry the ark around the city. And verse six says, Joshua son of Nun called the priests and said to him, take up the ark and come to the Lord and have seven priests carry trumpets, etc.

They march around the city once a day for six days, seven times on the seventh day. The point is the ark was being carried in front. The people shouted.

And in verse 12, it says, Joshua got up early the next morning and priests took up the ark of the Lord. The seven priests carrying the seven trumpets went forward, marching before the ark of the Lord and blowing the trumpet. The armed men went ahead of them and the rear guard followed the ark of the Lord.

And while the trumpets kept sounding, so on the second day, they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days. And verse 16, the seventh time around, this on the seventh day, when the priest sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the people, shout, the Lord has given you the city.

And you remember the walls collapsed. But the point is, right at the forefront, marching around the city, they carried the ark of the covenant. And God had given them victory.

Now, this is important background to understand what's happening here. They've gone to fight against the Philistines. 4,000 of their own people have been killed.

They come back and say, what happened? Why did God desert us? And they said, hey, let's take the ark of the covenant. Because that is what has happened in our past. And when we did, our enemies were scattered.

And so verse three says, let us bring the ark of the Lord's covenant from Shiloh so that it may go with us and save us from the hands of our enemies. And let me read on, if you're still in 1 Samuel 4, what happened? Verse five, it says, when the ark of the Lord's covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook. Hearing the uproar, the Philistines asked, what's all this shouting in the Hebrew camp? When they learned that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp, the Philistines were afraid.

A God has come into the camp, they said. We're in trouble. Nothing like this has ever happened before.

Woe to us. Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the desert. Be strong, Philistines.

Beat men, or you'll be subject to the Hebrews as they have been to you. Beat men and fight. So notice what's happening.

They take the ark into the Philistine camp. The Philistines are scared now. They say they brought their God into the camp.

Philistines said, beat men, fight. They rallied them and look what happened. Verse 10, so the Philistines fought and the Israelites were defeated.

Every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great. Israel lost 30,000 foot soldiers.

The ark of God was captured and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, the ones who carried the ark, Hophni and Phinehas, died. So they carried the ark into the battle. They faced the Philistines with this fresh confidence.

The Philistines characterized by fresh fear. Yet the Philistines thrashed the Israelites, steal the ark itself and kill the priests who carried. This is disaster.

Let me read you what happened. Verse 12, that day a Benjamite ran from the battle line and went to Shiloh, his clothes torn and dust on his head. When he arrived, there was Eli sitting on his chair by the side of the road, watching because his heart feared for the ark of God.

When the man entered the town and told what had happened, the whole town sent up a cry. Eli heard the outcry. Eli, of course, was the priest, the father of Hophni and Phinehas and he's an old man now.

Eli heard the cry and asked, what is the meaning of this uproar? The man hurried over to Eli. Who is 98 years old and whose eyes were set so that he could not see. And he told Eli, I have just come from the battle line.

I just fled from it this very day. Eli asked, what happened, my son? The man who brought the news replied, Israel fled before the Philistines and the army has suffered heavy losses. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas are dead and the ark of God has been captured.

When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died. For he was an old man and heavy, fat and flabby.

He'd led Israel for 40 years. His daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas was pregnant and near the time of delivery when she heard the news of the ark of God had been captured and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead. She went into labor and gave birth but was overcome by her labor pains.

And as she was dying, the woman attending her said, don't despair, you've given birth to a son. She did not respond or pay any attention. She named the boy Ichabod saying, the glory has departed from Israel because of the capture of the ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband.

She said the glory has departed from Israel for the ark of God has been captured. So now thrashed and beaten, a messenger runs back. Eli says, tell me what's happened.

They told him about his sons have been killed. What happened to the ark? The ark has been stolen. Eli was so shocked, he fell off his chair, broke his neck, died.

The news got to Phineas' wife, his daughter-in-law. She went prematurely into labor, gave birth, died in the process and named the baby with her last breath. And she called him Ichabod.

The glory has departed from Israel. It's a tragic story. But it has this origin in a very simple issue.

And forgive me for giving you lots of homework just to be thinking because we'll get to the point in a minute. And you won't get the point if you take a nap when I'm giving you the heavy stuff. But the simple issue is this.

When back in Joshua chapter 3, they crossed the Jordan with the priests carrying the ark in front of them. What Joshua said to the people in verse 5 was, consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, the Lord will do amazing things among you. The Lord will do amazing things.

In verse 10, he says, this is how you'll know that the living God is among you and that he will drive out your enemies. So the ark that the priests were carrying on their shoulders symbolized the presence of God amongst his people. But it was a symbol and a symbol only.

It's not the symbol we're looking to. They said it's God who's going to deliver us. It's God who's going to get us over into the land.

In Joshua chapter 6, when they went to the city of Jericho, what God said in verse 2 is this, I, that's God, I have delivered Jericho into your hands. In verse 16, it says, shout for the Lord has given you the city. Now, you carry the ark of the covenant on your shoulders, but it's God who's going to give you the city.

Now, go back to 1 Samuel chapter 4 and verse 3 and read it very carefully. Look at what they say. Let us bring the ark of the Lord's covenant from Shiloh so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies.

It will save us. If you have a King James Bible, it says, let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us that when it cometh among us, it may save us from the hand of our enemies. There's a lot of it and a lot of us, but nothing of God.

You see, what's happened is this. They have taken that which God had given to them as a symbol of his presence amongst them and they've detached the symbol from God himself and they began to trust the pattern, the symbol instead of God himself. And the moment you trust something, even though it may be something good that derives from God and you begin to trust it instead of God himself, God moves in.

You see, it's always easier to reproduce a pattern than to learn a truth and a principle. If we reduce the Christian life or if we reduce Christian service to programs that do not require divine initiative, divine originality, divine anointing, and divine activity, we can do them week after week after week, but we've killed them dead. And Sunday morning worship is simply karaoke and there's no life.

These men, these leaders, these elders of Israel have become godless men. And so in a fix, beaten by the Philistines who they should have beaten, they say, let's bring the ark and it will save us. Let's take it into the battle and they're superstitious.

They don't know God. They're just following the pattern. You know, sometimes we hear of a great move of God in some part of the world and we send our journalists and our photographers and our strategists to examine what God is doing in that part of the world and they reduce it to a program.

They turn it into a seminar. They put it into a loose leaf binder. They come home and they run seminars on how to have a revival.

And we wonder why it doesn't work. God wrote across this list. It was Phineas's wife who came up with the word Ichabod.

And you try to reproduce here what God does somewhere else and God wrote Ichabod across it. If there's a real work of God going in some part of the world, it's not because they've learned a new technique. It's because they're dealing with God.

But that's too costly. So we'd rather bring the ark and it will do something for us, we think. Reduce what God did there to a seminar and bring it here.

In 1905, 500 people from Wales went to the Keswick Convention in the north of England. The Keswick Convention had been running for a number of years. Its whole theme was seeking after holiness and finding God in his fullness.

And this contingent from Wales, full of the excitement of the Welsh revival. And every year, the Keswick Convention published a book which gave all the messages and descriptions that went on. And I wrote a history of the Keswick Convention a couple of years ago.

And I got well over a hundred, about 120 of these annual reports. And the 1905 report is interesting. There was an atmosphere that was electric.

But what happened was this. These 500 Welsh people had meetings after the main meetings were over. They went into the night when they sang some of the great songs of the Welsh revival.

Here is love vast as an ocean. Do you know that one? Hope we'll sing it this week. It's a beautiful revival hymn, you know it.

And they stayed late into the night in the hope they would reproduce what God had done in Wales. And it didn't happen. Other than there was some sense of, yes, there's something different here.

God didn't break through. And I would venture to suggest that what happened in Wales was that the revival degenerated into song. The Welsh loved to sing.

And they had some great songs that encapsulated the atmosphere and the truths of the revival. They would meet and just sing and no longer open the word. They tried to bring it.

I'm not criticising. Those were wonderful days. But I see the danger.

In your own level, we hear there's a church down the road that God seems to be blessing and we're struggling and so we send a couple of spies down the road and find out what they're doing. And they come back and they tell us we need a bonfire to burn our hymn books and a few other things. So we do all of that and we change our music and we change our style.

And we still don't see the blessing of God. So we send the spies back and they come back next week and say, we forgot to tell you you have to sing the songs 12 times each. And, you know, that's not... If God is at work there, that's not the reason.

You see, we're trying to imitate the pattern. Sometimes we say if we look back and say 25 years ago, 30 years ago, God was blessing something in a certain way. Let's do it again.

In Toronto, the late 40s and 50s, there's a great work of God done through the Youth for Christ movement. And they used to use the People's Church which subsequently moved away from the original building when it was down right in the middle of the town. But these Saturday night Youth for Christ rallies and many people were converted and there's still people today, old people in our church who were saved in those Youth for Christ rallies.

I myself actually was saved in the Youth for Christ rally in England. A man came to me about a year ago and he said, I want to give you... Gave me a number, several thousand dollars to restart Youth for Christ on Saturday nights. I said, well, that's a wonderful desire.

Were you converted in Youth for Christ? He said, yes, I was. He said, if we could recreate those rallies, we would see hundreds come to Christ. And I loved his heart.

We didn't take his money. We didn't restart Youth for Christ. Because you see, that's saying, this is what God did then.

Let's just repeat it now. You don't need to be men and women of God. You don't need to wrestle with God about this.

You need to seek Him and just repeat the pattern. When I was a student, I remember reading the biography of C.T. Studd. Do you know the name of C.T. Studd? He was a great missionary, statesman and pioneer.

China, then Uttarakhand in India, then in Congo, he became the founder of what is known as now as WECC International, which is not that known in Canada, but it's an international mission which started in Britain. And Studd was a great pioneer, great man of God. And I read his biography written by his son-in-law, Norman Grubb.

And it said in this biography that Studd used to wake up at 3.30 in the morning and spend an hour in prayer and in the scriptures to sleep at 4.30. And he did not miss that hour that he'd been awake. So if he normally slept eight hours, he did minus the hour in the middle, but he was just as refreshed as if he'd been in bed all night. And the writer says Studd saw this as the key to his own life.

Well, I read that and I thought, that's the key. So I set my alarm for 3.30. I got up. I made a cup of coffee, which Studd didn't do, but I needed to.

And I knelt down by my bed. I had a little flat thing to put my coffee on. I had my Bible.

I had my notebook, which was my prayer list. And I knelt down by my bed. And about four hours later, I woke up.

And I was stiff. My coffee was cold. And God was saying from heaven, Ichabod.

You see, it's not the 3.30 in the morning. It's not the pattern. It's the truth.

The truth is Studd took time to meet with God. That was the truth. Now his physiology was such he could do it in the middle of night and not miss it.

That isn't my physical makeup. See, none of these things are wrong. Carrying the ark was not in itself wrong.

There's no problem with learning from the movements of God in other places. That's why this book moved me so much. And that's why I love to hear and read about these revivals.

I've read all the stuff on the Hebridean revivals in Scotland, and the East Anglian revival in England, because I come from England and Britain, and those have been the areas that I've been interested in. But when they themselves become the object on which we depend, if we have this pattern, if we sing these songs, if we have this program, they become substitutes for God. You see, the ark had been built as God had told Moses exactly how to build it.

So form and method are important. It wasn't just a box knocked together somehow. It had exact specification, all of which was symbolic of something, exact materials.

But they trusted it when it was designed to represent God himself, and it was God they were to trust. You see, it's like an eggshell that contains a fertilized egg. There's no life in the shell.

It contains the egg that may have life in it, but you can punch a hole in either side of the egg and blow the yolk out and still have the shell, but it's dead. It'll never produce anything. The only source of life, the only source of power, the only source that transforms people's lives is God himself.

And the shortcut that they were looking for is don't do business with God. Don't spend the hours in prayer with God. Don't spend the time it takes to discern the mind and the will of God.

Don't spend time in the Word of God. Skip all that and just give me the program. And I have the privilege of pastoring a church, and we have a crowd of people there.

And everybody wants to know how to make things happen. How do we do this? How do we get that result? And the question is always the wrong question. It's who is the source of this? Who is the source of power? Who is going to change lives? You see, if regeneration, salvation, is raising the dead, who does that? Only God can raise the dead.

So whereas you must talk to the people who are dead in their sin as the agency by which God is going to access their minds and their hearts, but we better make sure we spend time talking to God about them. It's his business alone. But we live in a day, of course, when we're too busy for that.

We live in a day when everything's instant. I was in a McDonald's. Sorry to confess that.

A guy in front of me was ordering a cheese or a chicken burger or something, and the girl behind the counter said, it'll be 53 seconds. Are you willing to wait? He said, as long as it's not more. You go back to Genesis when Abraham had two men visit him, and he said, stay for a minute.

One was an incarnation of God. One of those occasions when God, what theologians call a theophany or Christophany, is incarnate in human form. And he said, stay and have a meal.

And they said, no, we have to go. He said, no, stay and have a meal. And they said, all right, we'll stay and have a meal.

I love it. He says, Abraham said to the servant, go and find the fattest calf and kill it and skin it and cook it. So another servant, go and get the best grain, grind it into flour and knead it into dough and bake some bread.

So these two men, we need to go. Well, just stay for a meal. No, we have to go.

Well, just stay for a meal. All right, we'll stay for a meal. We're going to have some beef and some bread.

Where's the beef? Well, it's running over the hill at the moment. You know, just giving a lasso to the servant here. Where's the bread? Well, it's in the barn.

It's still grain, you know. This is not McDonald's. You know, there's a verse in Isaiah 519.

It's a very important verse. Woe to those who say, let God hurry. Let him finish his work that we may see it.

In other words, woe to those who say, God, would you please work on my timetable? It's in a whole series of woes. And most of those woes, we recognize. Woe to those who step late getting drunk.

Woe to those who build house to house and there's no fields left. And woe to those who say, let God hurry. One of the great things about Jesus in his own ministry, if you notice, is that Jesus could never be locked into a pattern.

He was always original. You read Matthew 8 and 9 sometimes. There are 10 distinct miracles in those two chapters.

And it's very interesting to look at how Jesus performed those miracles. There was a leper, the first person he healed. And he reached out and he touched the leper.

Now, nobody touched lepers normally because they had a contagious disease. Jesus always touched lepers. You ever noticed that? He always touched them.

But he touched them and said, be clean. The man was healed. And then a centurion came and said, you know, my servant is sick.

And Jesus said, I'll come visit him. No, you don't have to come and visit. Just say the word.

And Jesus said, your faith, go home. Your servant is healed. Your faith has healed him.

He went home, found his servant had been healed. Jesus never touched that man. Never even saw him.

And then a paralytic was brought to Jesus. And Jesus spoke to him and said, your sins are forgiven. Get up and walk.

He never touched him. He just spoke to him. Man jumped to his feet.

And then he was in the crowd. And a woman came up the crowd. She'd been bleeding for 38 years.

Sorry, for 12 years, in this case. And she reached out and touched him. And she was healed.

Jesus turned and said, who touched me? And there was this embarrassed looking woman. And he said, your faith has healed you. Now, we read that.

We don't blink. Jesus touched the leper. He just spoke about the centurion's servant.

He just spoke to the paralytic. The woman touched him. He didn't touch her.

But I imagine if those people like we are today, when Jesus left that town, all kinds of problems occurred. I imagine that some of these folks got together. And one of them said, you know, when Jesus was here, he touched me.

And it was like I could feel the power of God coming down his arm and through his fingers into me. Did you feel that when he healed you? The man said, what do you mean? Were you healed by Jesus? Yeah, I was healed by Jesus. Well, when he touched you, did you feel the power of God? No, he didn't touch me.

But that's what he does. He touches people. No, no, no, no, no, no.

No, yours must have just been psychosomatic. He doesn't touch people. He just spoke the word.

And he spoke with such authority. He said, get up. And I haven't got up for years.

I got up. Did you not hear that when he spoke like that to you? Well, no, he didn't speak like that to me. So they probably split up, you see, and they formed two churches.

One forms the touchy church. And they meet every week and sing their favorite songs. He touched me to get a touch from the Lord is so real.

That's their favorite song. And then you have the Church of the Word over here. And they meet every week and sing their favorite songs.

Speak, Lord, in the stillness while we wait on thee. And they break up into two different groups on the basis of two different experiences of Jesus. And then somebody else comes into town one day.

And he says, you know, I've been healed by Jesus. And they get all excited. Oh, that's wonderful.

The leaders of both churches go to visit him. And the first one is the touchy church. And he says, I understand you were healed by Jesus.

He said, yeah, I was. I was fine, actually. And he healed me.

That's fantastic. Did you feel the power when he touched you? I mean, we'd love you to come and give your testimony at our meeting on Sunday night. And you say, well, I'm sorry.

I don't quite know what you mean. What do you mean when he touched me? Well, when he touched you, well, he didn't touch me. So the second man says, excuse me, we're from the Church of the Word.

And I'm sure when he spoke to you, you heard his authority. And we'd love you to come and share your testimony. He said, well, he didn't speak to me.

You mean he didn't speak to you? No. First man says, he didn't touch you? No. What'd he do? Oh, he did what he always does.

What do you mean, what'd he do? He just spat in my eye. Didn't he spit on you? I'd love to have been there that day, actually, because in Mark chapter 8, it says, don't sidetrack, but Mark 8, verse 22, they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him.

Notice that. His friends were from the touchy church. They brought him Jesus, and they begged him to touch him.

Lord, just let me hold your hand. In other words, we know the pattern. We know the program.

We know exactly how to touch Jesus. It's very simple. You can do it while you're talking.

Just touch him. I would love to have been there, because Jesus had the man standing in front of him. Imagine the crowd went quiet.

We're going to see a miracle. All excited. The crowd went quiet.

They heard, and he spat in his eye. So he probably calls, starts a church called the Church of the Holy Spittle. And their favorite song is, Spittle of the living God, fall afresh on me.

You know, we laughed, because you needed to relax a little bit. But the important thing was never how they were healed. The important thing was who healed them.

And when he later met another blind man, he spat again. They must have thought this is what he does when he spits, but he spit and he missed. He knelt down into the floor, mixed it in the clay, and went to the man, whoop into one eye, whoop into the other.

That's not a nice thing to do to blind people. They're already blind anyway. Put a lump of clay in their mouth.

And said, walk to the pool of Siloam, which is down some very rickety steps. Just in case you think the spitting is what does it. Now there are doctrinal truths that are always true.

Of course there are. We're not talking about playing around with the gospel, playing around with what we tell people, playing around with how we respond to God. But we must let God be God.

And the problem here was, was that the Israelites knew the pattern. Let's bring the ark of the Lord's covenant from Shiloh so that it may go with us and it will save us. And they got the biggest shock of their life.

They discovered it was an empty, lifeless, powerful box. And you can find your Christianities empty, lifeless, and powerless as well. If it's your Christianity that is your object of dependence, not Christ himself.

You see, what God blesses as an expression of himself, he may condemn when it becomes a substitute for himself. The ark was designed to be an expression of himself. But it became a substitute for himself.

Do you remember Hezekiah? Hezekiah was that king who never wrote a book. I remember when you were a kid. But when I was a kid, people would say things from the book of Hezekiah.

And I nearly sent my Bible back once. I couldn't find it. But Hezekiah was a real king.

He was a good king. And when he came to the throne after a succession of bad kings, it says in 2 Kings 18 in verse 3, he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as his father David had done. Listen, he removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones, and cut down the Asherah poles.

He broke, now that's good. You would have cheered him on. He's destroying all these pagan idols.

And then it says, he broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made. Remember that time in the wilderness when the people were bitten by snakes? And God told Moses, build a bronze serpent on a

pole. And anybody bitten by a snake, instead of the poison, the venom in their veins causing them to drop dead, if they looked to that bronze serpent and believed they would live.

And they did. And they kept that bronze serpent. And Hezekiah, this good king, who smashed these pagan idols and symbols of adultery, smashed into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made.

Listen to this. From that time, the Israelites had been burning incense to it. It had become a relic.

It had become a sacred object. It had become a superstition. And Hezekiah not only smashed the pagan idols, he smashed, put it this way, the Christian idols or the equivalent thereof.

And you'll find the prophets again and again are not telling you what's wrong with the world. They're telling what's wrong with the people of God. Your song, says Amos, away with your songs.

I am sick of your songs, said God. Why, because they're not true? No, they might have been good songs. But you think singing them is worship.

And you go out and you live like the pagans down the road. And you're kidding yourself. That's Amos.

Now, very quickly, to get to the real point of this message. This is just background to it. You read chapter five and chapter six.

I'll tell you what happened. We won't have time to read it. But what happened to the ark is that when the Philistines stole the ark, they took it down to Ashdod.

And because they thought this is the God of the Israelites, because they knew that this had been associated with God working, they put in the temple of Dagon, their God. They gave it respect, put in the temple of Dagon. Next morning, they came in and Dagon, their idol, had fallen over.

And his head had broken off. That was embarrassing, so they propped him up. That's a coincidence.

But then tumors began to break out in gas. And so they decided, this didn't happen before we brought the ark of Israel. So let's move it down to Ekron.

So they took it down to, rather, they sent it to Gath. Sorry, from Ashdod. From Gath, they sent it to Ekron.

And they passed it around like a hospital. And everywhere it went, it caused trouble. I find that interesting.

I find that it was an example of a man who refused to honor amongst his own people. It did represent his presence. And in chapter six, the Philistines then decided, we need to send this back to Israel.

This has caused nothing but trouble. It might just be coincidence. So I'll tell you what they said.

We're going to put an ark on a calf, and we're going to attach to it two cows of Jacob's calf. And those cows do what they think is the best thing to do, because they're the most powerful. But in the eyes of the Philistines, that's exactly what happened.

You read it in chapter six. They came to a place called Beth Shemesh, where the Israelites were working in the field. And they were so excited when they saw the cattle coming, putting the ark on the cart, that they took it off the cart.

They chopped up the cart, made a fire of it, chopped up the cows then, and put them on the fire as an offering. And then they decided to look into the ark. And when they did so, tragedy struck.

70 of them died. The King James says 50,070, but 70 is more likely. God had warned them back in the book of Numbers, chapter four, that the priests were to carry the ark, and not to touch the holy things, not even to look into them, for if you do, you will die.

And so 70 people died. Because although God said, this is a place where I'll meet with you, they were to meet him there on the basis of shed blood. And you see, if any man, woman, boy, or girl seeks to meet with God on any basis other than the basis of shed blood, you do not meet a friend, you meet a judge.

And 70 of them died. So they took it to the house of a man called Abinadam in the town called Kiriath-Jerim. And Abinadam's son, whose name was Eliezer, guarded it and guarded it for the next 20 years.

I was speaking at a youth conference in Israel on one occasion. I arrived and they took me to the place of this conference. It was out somewhere up in some hills and it was in a village.

And I said, what's the name of this village? They said, Kiriath-Jerim. I said, oh, that's the place where the Ark stayed for 20 years. Anybody know where Abinadam's house is? Nobody did.

It's been gone. So I walked around that village for 20 years. I stayed there.

Now let me turn you to chapter 7. And this is important now. First verse says that they kept it for 20 years, at least they took it up to the house in Kiriath-Jerim, the house of Abinadam. And in verse 2 it says, it was a long time, 20 years in all, that the Ark remained at Kiriath-Jerim.

Now listen to this. And all the people of Israel mourned and sought after the Lord. Now earlier, let's take the Ark.

It will save us. They were thrashed. The Ark was stolen.

Now it's a totally different atmosphere to that of chapter 4. They sought after the Lord. Verse 3, and Samuel said to the house of Israel, if you are returning to the Lord with all your hearts, in other words, if this is not just some play acting and you're serious about this and you're turning back to the Lord now, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the Lord and serve Him only and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. In other words, he says, get rid of every other object of dependency.

If you're going to now seek the Lord, then you've got to realize that things on which you're depending, get rid of them. You see, sometimes we Christians are pluralistic in the sense, yes, we want to turn to God. We want God to do things only God can do, but we also want to trust other things that we have in our lives, in our security, and our well-beings depend on those.

We know we're trusting them because when those go, we're in big trouble. I was in Japan a while ago, and in Japan, every home, Shinto home has a God shelf. And you have symbols of your various gods and ancestors and things on the God shelf in the house.

And one of the difficulties when they're trying to evangelize and bring Japanese to Christ, there are those who say, oh yes, I will become a Christian. And what they do is put some symbol of Christian like a cross

on the God shelf. Move the gods over a little bit, make a bit of space.

We'll stick Jesus in there. Now, it's very obvious in the Japanese culture when they do that. And you say, no, you've got to wipe the shelf clean.

But you know, we do that too. We say, I'm trusting my finances. I'm trusting my relationships.

I'm trusting my health. I'm trusting my position. And when these things go, no, life collapses for us.

Because I've sat and talked to many people. And I've said, where's God in all this? They say, well, God isn't the problem. It's that this is gone.

I said, well, why is that a problem if God isn't the problem? If God isn't the problem, if God is your strength, if God is your rock, if God is your security, if Christ is your life, what is the problem? No, but you've got a God shelf. You say, get rid of all these objects of dependence. Including it, the ark that you're going to depend on.

You seek beyond that. You seek the Lord. He will deliver you.

And verse 7 says, Let us assemble all Israel at Mizpah, and I'll intercede with the Lord. On that day, they fasted, and there they confessed we have sinned against the Lord. Every renewal, every revival, we have sinned against the Lord.

Verse 7, when the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them because they're cocky and incompetent because of their past experience. And when the Israelites heard of it, they were afraid because of the Philistines, because they remember that they've been beaten before. They said to Samuel, Do not stop crying out to the Lord, our God, for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines.

Notice the difference now. It's that God may rescue us. And then it says down in verse 10, While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle.

But that day the Lord thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites. Were they better equipped than last time? No. Were they better armed? No.

Were they better trained? No. The Lord, it says, thundered against the Philistines. It was God who gave them the victory.

In verse 12, Samuel took a stone and set it up at Mizpah and Shan. He named it Ebenezer, saying, Thus far has the Lord helped us. Ebenezer.

God did it. We've got two Hebrew words tonight. First Hebrew word was the word Ichabod.

The glory has departed because you've put our trust in it. Something good, something legitimate, something with a history, but we look to it instead of to God. And that was Ichabod.

The glory has departed. You're defeated. You're thrashed.

But now it's cry to the Lord. Samuel, you intercede for us that the Lord will deliver us. And the Lord thundered and the Philistines were defeated.

And they met together. They put up the stone at Mizpah and they called it Ebenezer. God did it.

I wonder which of those two words might more accurately describe your life. Ichabod, it's possible you're here tonight with a measure of nostalgia, some of you, because you've known good days. You've known great days.

You've known days of blessing. Maybe days of personal spiritual revival and renewal. You've known days in the past when you knew God was at work in your life and through your life.

You have an appetite for God. But it's been a while and Ichabod has been written across your life. Maybe good things you began to trust.

Maybe you've become a little arrogant. I know God and they don't. My church is so rotten.

But I'm doing well. Spiritual pride, smells in the nostrils of God. We have to come back and say, Lord, forgive me.

Thank you for every measure in which you've blessed me in the past. Forgive me. I've clung to that.

I've clung to it. I've tried to repeat it. Instead of looking to you, that you God who are alive and fresh and active, you are the one I'm looking to.

You're the one I'm surrendering my life to. You're the one that I'm opening every avenue of my life to. You're the one I'm confessing every sin to.

You're the one I'm bringing those strongholds in my life that I find so beaten by, and I can't rid of them. I bring them to you. I confess them.

And you do the surgery in my heart. And the story will change to Ebenezer. God has done it.

I don't know how God is going to work in our hearts this week. This is just one meeting out of a whole sequence. But my prayer and my expectancy is there's going to be an escalating sense of what it is God wants to do in our lives here.

Forget about Victoria for the moment. And me. Where has my evangelical Christianity, my orthodoxy, my doctrinal integrity become itself the object? Instead of God.

Because you see, anything good can become an idol. And maybe as we close, there are those amongst us tonight, and I am not in any way exempt from this in my own life or heart, who found it so much easier just to rely on patterns, programs, things that worked, instead of God himself. We become dry.

I'm a red path with used to say in electric train with fast trains ran up near where I don't live to Cape Mare. I live for many years to Cape Mare. I was going to London train line.

Electric trains, fast trains, he said, power on the overhead line cuts. The train will run for another 20 miles. And the passengers won't realize they've lost the power because they'll still be moving.

And his application, that was this, that you can lose touch with God. You can be so wrapped up in your own spiritual life. You've detached it from God.

You don't know there's no power anymore. It's just you slowly come to a ground, to a standstill. Some of you may have come hungry this week because you know God, and you experience God, and you're full of God, you want everybody else to share the same.

But many of us have come this week because we're hungry to know that for ourselves. And there's no method. It's just saying, here I am.

Do your work in my heart. Cleanse me. Convict me first.

The relief of cleansing is only experienced when there's been conviction. It's not, the cross is not a doormat to wipe out dirty feet so acceptable. It's dealing with the very root of why we do what we're doing.

We realize I'm crucified with Christ, but old me nailed with him. I live but not I, it's Christ. That's my focus now.

Christ lives in me. I'm going to suggest you have a moment of prayer. If you know you need to get right with God tonight, and God the Holy Spirit has spoken to you about specific things.

I have talked in general terms, but the Spirit of God, as so often he does, has put his finger on some specific things. Maybe somebody here, and you're being drained by something else in your life. Either you're depending on, and it's good.

Maybe it's something bad. Maybe you have a secret life that nobody else knows about. In that secret world, you're hooked, pornography, lust, greed, envy, bitterness.

The devil will find his foothold. He'd say, Lord, this is bigger than me. It's not bigger than you.

The cross bore this sin, this thing that grips me. Cleanse me and forgive me, and by your risen life, fill me. Replace all of that with life, spiritual life that is the life of God himself.

You'll still battle because the devil's on your back, and will be till the day you die. But you know a peace in your heart, a rest in him and his presence, his strength, and a flow through you to bless other people. Let's pray together.

I'm going to pray a very simple prayer. It's not one that I've thought through. I'm just going to pray as a penitent sinner, needing forgiveness and cleansing and restoration.

If you want to pray this with me, please do so. I'm going to ask you to do something that may take courage, just to stand. I'm going to pray for those who'll be standing, that the Spirit of God will make Jesus fresh again, that he'll bear witness with our spirits that we're in touch with you.

Lord Jesus, I come to you aware of my sin. Not just the temptation, but areas of my life that I've put protection around. I've kept it as my pet sin.

Attitudes of my heart, thoughts, habits, maybe anger, bitterness, lust. Forgive me, I've justified these things. Lord, I bring them out in the open to you.

Thank you, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. The blood is enough for my sin. Forgive me, but replace all that I am, Lord Jesus, with all that you are by the fullness of your Holy Spirit, that he might live the life of Jesus in me.

Not just to make me feel better, but that my life be an instrument for the blessing of other people. Fill me with yourself. Give me an excitement to be your agent in our world, to believe that you can work through me.

Thank you for hearing my prayer. In Jesus' name, please stay in an attitude of prayer, and if God has spoken to you, and you have responded to him, please stand as a witness to that. Not just a witness to ask for the spirit of prayer, but a witness to your own heart, and a statement before all the principalities and powers that something fresh has begun in your life.

And there are a number of people on their feet. I'm going to pray for them, and maybe others want to join them. Lord, I pray for every man and woman who is standing here tonight.

The young person, you know what it is, that you have spoken to them about personally, and I pray that you will give them a fresh sense of joy as they leave here tonight, a fresh sense of being clean before you, a sense of being taken over by you, filled by your spirit, and I pray that every one of these lives here will give evidence that Jesus is present in a new way, that the way they live, the way they speak, the way husbands and wives will treat each other, and talk to each other, even on the way home tonight, and thank you for couples who are on their feet. Back in the workplace tomorrow, back amongst your people here or elsewhere, there may be something about us that is inexplicable apart from Jesus Christ. I pray you'll give them the grace to resist the attacks that will surely come, the temptations, the doubts, the seductions.

Lord, deliver them, I pray. And may this be the beginning of a mighty work in this city. I commit each one of these people to you.

In Jesus' name, amen. Please be seated. I don't know, brother, if you have just an appropriate song of response.

We're going to then finish the service. As you know, we meet again tomorrow morning, a full day tomorrow. If you're free in the day, I know that you'll be blessed by being here.

If you're not free in the day, of course, the evening meetings, the next two days. But it would be good, just as we go, just to sing a song of response. How about, my Jesus, I love you? Unless you've got one.

My Jesus, I love you. I know thou art mine. For thee, all the follies of sin, I resign.

My gracious Redeemer, my Saviour art thou. If ever I love thee, my Jesus, tis now. God bless you.

Amen.

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