

# Bethany-the House of Revival

by David Smithers

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*David Smithers' sermon emphasizes Bethany as a model for creating an environment conducive to revival through humility, faith, and genuine worship of Jesus Christ.*

**Scripture:** 2 Chronicles 7:14, Proverbs 22:28, Isaiah 44:3, Isaiah 57:15, Matthew 5:3, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 21:12, Matthew 21:17, Matthew 26:13, Luke 10:42, John 11:40, James 4:6

**Topics:** "Revival Preparation", "Christ Centeredness"

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## Description

David Smithers preaches about the significance of Bethany as a place where Jesus found rest and hospitality, emphasizing the need for the Church to prepare a dwelling place for the manifest presence of Christ in anticipation of a mighty revival. Bethany symbolizes spiritual poverty, brokenness, and childlike faith, creating an atmosphere where Jesus can perform remarkable miracles. The house of Bethany was arranged for Jesus' sake, with extravagant love and devotion lavished upon Him, making Him the sole object of worship and affection. Repentance and a Christ-centered focus are highlighted as essential for true revival, contrasting the self-centered religious practices that hinder the presence of God.

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## Transcript

A mere half hour walk east from the wall of Jerusalem, across the Kidron valley, past Gethsemane and over the ridge of Olivet, brings you to the humble town of Bethany. This obscure village nestled on the side of the Mount of Olives would have been long forgotten, if not for the fact that it became the nightly resting-place of Jesus Christ. Bethany will forever be honored and remembered through the coming ages, because one of its humble homes provided shelter and hospitality to Him who had no place to lay His head. Jesus was repeatedly honored in Bethany, whether it was at the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus or in the house of Simon the leper. Therefore, Bethany naturally became the preferred dwelling place of our Lord and Savior!

The fact that Jesus consistently dwelt in Bethany, should be of special interest to all those who are looking for a mighty, end-time revival. For what is revival, but God Almighty finding a dwelling place on earth? True revival is ultimately nothing more or less than the abiding visitation of the manifest presence of Jesus Christ. Many today are eagerly expecting a revival visitation, however, it is my prayerful conviction that the Church as a whole is not nearly as far along in the revival-birthing process as some presently believe! Unquestionably a widespread revival is coming, nevertheless, there is still much more preparation required. We need to seriously ask ourselves, what still needs to be done to make our corporate meetings

a place where Jesus can consistently and comfortably dwell? We are living in the season when the Holy Spirit is eagerly searching for places that are spiritually prepared for Christ's manifest presence. Bethany was such a place. There was a rare spiritual atmosphere in Bethany that made it comfortable and appealing to the heart and spiritual appetite of Jesus.

#### A House of Brokenness

The very name Bethany alludes to one reason why Jesus so frequently resided in this secluded and obscure village. One of the primary translations of the name Bethany is: house of mourning or poverty. Bethany is a picture of spiritual poverty, brokenness and humility. To the broken and needy, the Scriptures clearly promise the abiding presence of Christ's Kingdom on earth. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" Matt. 5:3-6. Jesus ALWAYS resists and avoids the proud, but He cherishes the company of broken and humble hearts (James 4:6 & Isa. 57:15). Jesus never fails to pour out the refreshing rains of revival on those who are truly thirsty (Isa 44:3).

#### A House of Childlike Faith

Bethany was much more than just a place where a few hurting people recognized their spiritual need. There are many today that recognize their own neediness, and yet never enter into the reviving presence of Jesus Christ! Bethany was not merely a place of abstract spiritual poverty; it was a nursery and haven for childlike faith. The hospitality and care given to Jesus at Bethany was the supernatural by-product of trusting and believing hearts. As Mary, Martha and Lazarus opened their hearts in faith toward Christ, they naturally opened their home and lives. This small congregation of needy and trusting hearts created a spiritual climate where Jesus could do some of His most remarkable miracles. It was while at Bethany that Jesus taught about the necessity of resurrection and reviving faith. -"Did I not say if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" John 11:40. Childlike faith empowers prayer and calls forth life out of death and darkness (John 11:41-44). Yes, it was at Bethany that Lazarus was miraculously raised from the dead, resulting in many other Jews believing unto salvation (John 12:9-11). Faith is contagious. God-given faith will always create an opportunity for faith to be nurtured in others. Childlike faith opens the windows of heaven and ushers in the glory of God. Without a steadfast faith in the promises of Jesus Christ, it will be impossible for us to encourage the Spirit of revival in our homes and local fellowships. A pessimistic and unbelieving spirit is the enemy of true revival! We must mix all our preparations for revival with grace-filled faith, lest we find ourselves chasing the winds of revival in the strength of the flesh! (Heb. 4:2).

#### A House Arranged For Jesus' Sake

A needy heart coupled with true faith will always lavish the person of Christ with extravagant love. Bethany was a place where the person of Jesus was needed, trusted and consequently appreciated and cherished. When Jesus came to Bethany, He was extravagantly anointed with fragrant and costly perfumes. It was at Bethany that He was bathed with tears and holy kisses of gratefulness. At no other time during our Lord's earthly ministry was Christ so completely worshiped and adored as in Bethany (Mk. 14:3-9, Lk. 7:36-50 & John 12:1-8).

In Bethany, Jesus took His rightful place as the sole object of everyone's devotion and affections. In Luke 10:38-42 we find Mary sitting at His feet, embracing every word, as it falls from His lips. Mary was totally content just to sit at Christ's feet and behold the glory and beauty of His face. She joyfully gave Jesus her

undivided attention. Mary's encounter with Jesus demonstrates the fact that the highest privilege given to man, on earth or in heaven, is a deeper revelation of Jesus Christ. Mary's encounter with Christ reminds us that there is really only ONE thing needful, and that is JESUS! He alone is truly the better part (Luke 10:42). Bethany was the place where Jesus alone was exalted and made preeminent above all other human personalities, plans and programs.

The house of Bethany was a home carefully arranged for the pleasure and enjoyment of Jesus Christ. Every meal and every activity was planned in view of His preferences and comfort. Jesus was always the honored guest, and therefore His desires and needs naturally came first. Jesus often fed the hungry multitudes during His earthly ministry, but while at Bethany it was our Savior's hungry heart that was fed a carefully prepared meal of love and devotion. He was not hurriedly given some stale leftovers at the last minute, but the very best they had! "Jesus came to Bethany. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil" John 12:1-3. In the house of Bethany, everything revolved around Jesus, and as a result the whole house was filled with the sweet fragrance of His healing and reviving presence. Later, when some jealously attacked this outpouring of extravagant love, Jesus boldly prophesied that Mary's devotion at Bethany would never be forgotten: "Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her" Matt. 26:13. The love and worship that Jesus received at Bethany is to be an everlasting witness to the life-changing power of the gospel. The House of Bethany gives us a beautiful picture of what Christ desires from all who would call themselves the Church.

#### A House of Repentance

The fact that the house of Bethany was carefully arranged to accommodate the desires of Jesus implies that it was also a place of genuine repentance. Repentance, simply defined, is a change of mind resulting in a change of heart and action. As we turn from a position of self-reliance and unbelief to a position of childlike faith in Christ, we begin to walk in repentance. Our lives and affections will ALWAYS revolve around the things or person in whom we trust. Therefore, it is impossible to separate true saving and reviving faith from genuine repentance. Revival can only be experienced to the extent that we are willing to entrust the control our lives and preferences to the control of Jesus Christ! Repentance is an ongoing process of realigning our hearts and lives with the kingdom of God. It is impossible to fully enjoy the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth (REVIVAL) while rebelling against the King of Kings. Knowing this, we must beware of accepting or entertaining any concept of revival that doesn't involve the clear message and ministry of repentance. In seasons of revival there will always be some variation in ministry methods and Spiritual manifestations. However, a deep work of repentance is one of the unchanging landmarks on the battlefield of revival (Prov. 22:28). Any efforts to promote the Spirit of revival apart from the ministry of repentance is destined to be shallow and superficial. Be assured of this, there has never been a revival without a deep work of repentance, and there never will be one! (2 Chron. 7:14).

#### A House In Contrast With the Temple

Jesus often ministered and taught in Jerusalem's beautiful temple, but as evening approached He always made His way back to the quiet house of Bethany to rest and pray (Mt. 21:17, Mk. 11:11, Luke 21:37 & Luke 22:39). Though Jerusalem was called the city of David, it was no longer spiritually ordered after the heart and affections of God. Multitudes of devout Jews regularly traveled to the temple in Jerusalem in

search of God's presence, while the One they sought, was a mere two miles away in the humble house of Bethany. Jesus passionately loved the people of Jerusalem, yet He could not dwell there, because so many opposed His kingdom principles of humility and childlike faith. Remember what Jesus said about this seemingly religious city: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! "See! Your HOUSE is left to you desolate and EMPTY" Matt 23:37-38.

Jerusalem's house of worship appeared to be the ideal place where a hungry, seeking heart could find God, but appearances can be deceiving. This so-called sanctuary was not spiritually arranged for God's pleasure and glory. Its daily activities no longer accurately represented the Father's heart and desires. It was not a true reflection of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, but a self-serving religious machine controlled by proud and ambitious hirelings. In Mt. 21:12-17 Jesus symbolically cleansed the temple, giving us a brief glimpse of how the house of God should look and function. He started by removing the spiritual obstacles and unnecessary religious structures. In Mt. 21:12, He jealously drove out all those who had defiled the court of the Gentiles with their religious manipulation and merchandizing. The temple in Jerusalem had become an unsafe place where self-absorbed ministers ignored and disregarded those whom Christ came to save. Jesus found His Father's house cluttered and out of order, and therefore He zealously rearranged the furniture, throwing out the unwanted tables and misbehaving guests with their idolatrous money worship. That which self-serving religion depends on the most, MONEY & HUMAN STRUCTURE, Jesus openly disregarded and cast on the ground.

This was not some random fit of anger, but a deliberate and very necessary step in the house-cleansing process. Mark 11:16 records that after this, Jesus then filled and occupied the very place where these religious men previously ministered. "He would not let anyone carry wares through the temple." After the house was cleansed and reoccupied by its rightful owner, Jesus then boldly proclaimed the purpose of His house, and suddenly it began to miraculously function as it was always intended. Mt. 21:13-15 describes these wonderful events: "And (JESUS) said to them, 'It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den or dark cave of thieves. Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' They were indignant." Once the house was cleansed of its manipulation and refocused on the person of Jesus Christ, it was quickly filled with prayer, healing power and childlike praise!

### Can True Revival be Hindered?

After our Lord had cleansed and reestablished proper Spiritual order in the temple, the existing religious leaders indignantly refused to yield their control to the true Master of the house. Jesus then withdrew from them and went where He was welcome and wanted! "Then He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and He lodged there" Matt 21:17. These scriptures explain why revivals are sometimes enjoyed at one church for an extended season, while at other churches they are very short-lived. Throughout the history of the Church, revivals have often spontaneously broken out, only to be later hindered and quenched by some man-made tradition, cowardly pastor or controlling deacon. Such spiritual hindrances have often been erroneously attributed to the precious truth of God's Sovereignty. This Biblical doctrine has been repeatedly used throughout the history of the Church to excuse and veil a lack of revival preparation and cooperation. Many have falsely asserted that the Church can do nothing to contribute to, or hinder a true revival. This kind of gross error has left many a saint disqualified and shamefully

unprepared in a season of revival and harvest. "He that gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely, but he who sleeps in the harvest is a son that causes shame" Prov. 10:5. A stubborn religious heart, if left unchecked, will ultimately seek to manipulate the Bible in order to shirk its own spiritual responsibility!

We must also beware of trying to create a revival in our own image. Many people cannot accept by faith what they have not already experienced, regardless of how Scriptural it may be. Sadly, there are those among us today, who belligerently refuse to tolerate anything except their own, narrow, predetermined interpretation of revival. If faced with a genuine revival manifestation of power, they would quickly curse it and run for the door. The religious leaders in Jesus' day claimed that they wanted a visitation of the Messiah, yet when Jesus Christ suddenly came to His house and turned their religious system upside-down, they violently rejected Him.

When some speak of seeking revival today, what they really mean is they want their existing religious system blessed, honored and multiplied. They merely want more of what they already have. How many of us would still continue to pray for revival if we were convinced that it would mean the reformation or even sacrifice of our favorite church doctrines and traditions. When lasting revival comes, many of our major denominations, out of necessity, will have to undergo radical reformation in order to accommodate the spontaneous nature of the Holy Spirit. If not, they will spiritually die and eventually crumble! (Mt. 9:16-17, Lk. 5:36-39). A true visitation of God will unquestionably require ALL of us to CHANGE, or we will be passed over just like the rigid and unyielding Judaism of Christ's day!

#### Self-Centered Religion Kills Revival

Jesus rejected the temple as His resting place, because in spite of its obvious physical beauty, it was not truly a Christ-centered and Christ focused house! How many of our local churches are run much of the same way. We enter the front foyer on Sunday morning and receive our weekly bulletin for worship. Yet, it is often more like arriving at our favorite restaurant where we are greeted and then handed a menu, listing all our favorite appetizers and entrees. Each item is expected to be neatly prepared and quickly served, all for our personal satisfaction. We love this place because they know how to make it OUR way. The so-called worship meeting starts and stops according to our personal preferences and schedule. If the Lord of Glory doesn't seem to show up and meet all our felt needs in a mere hour and a half, we will just have to find another church with better service! After all, we pay good money to eat here. Can we really expect a visitation of God in our churches with this kind of self-serving religious attitude?

To avoid any misunderstanding, let me say that there is nothing wrong with bulletins or scheduled services. Such things have a legitimate place in the Body of Christ, and certainly no one is denying the necessity of ministering to the needs of hurting people. However, we need to remember that like Aaron and his sons, we are called first to minister to God, before attempting to bestow a blessing upon others (Exodus 28). We need to carefully reconsider what our primary purpose is as the House of God. Is it right that the preferences and feelings of MAN are being exalted above the feelings and affections of Jesus Christ? Have we forgotten that Christ is not just some cold and unfeeling piece of orthodox theology! He is a real person with real feelings and emotions! The Apostles did not turn the world upside down by handing out books on theology and church order. They introduced the world to the PERSON of Jesus Christ! They unveiled the living Lamb of God, which they had each personally seen, handled and experienced (1 John 1:1-4). They boldly called all men everywhere to die to themselves and worship and love Jesus. The early Apostolic Church was founded upon the preaching and pursuit of Christ above all else! (1 Cor. 2:2, 2 Cor. 4:5, Phil. 3:8 & Col. 1:28). Our EVERY NEED is only met as we seek first to meet the needs and desires of

Christ's heart! (Mt. 6:33). Everything we do as the Church must be done first and foremost for the personal pleasure and glory of the LAMB. "All things were created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist" Col. 1:16-17.

### Revival Preparation Demands Reformation

The preparations needed for the coming revival demand that we radically change the way we view Jesus Christ and His house. Our churches must rediscover the priority of adoring the Lamb of God before all others. God's honor, kingdom and pleasure must always come before ours! This was the strength of the Moravians who prepared the way for the First Great Awakening in the 18th century. The words of their leader Count Zinzendorf reflect their relentless passion for the person of Jesus. He writes, "Our method of proclaiming salvation is this: to point out to every heart the loving Lamb, who died for us; to never, either in discourse or in argument, to digress even for a quarter of an hour from the loving Lamb; to name no virtue except in Him, and from Him and on His account; to preach no commandment except faith in Him; no other justification but that He atoned for us; no other sanctification but the privilege to sin no more; no other happiness but to be near Him, to think of Him and do His pleasure; no other self denial but to be deprived of Him and His blessings; no other calamity but to displease Him; no other life but in Him." This is the heart cry of true Apostolic Christianity. This kind of fervent loyalty and jealousy for the honor of Jesus Christ is indispensable, if we are to be fashioned into the resting place of God and a house of REVIVAL!

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