

# Revival Stories: 1857-1858 Revival

by E.A. Johnston

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*The 1857-1858 revival was a national awakening that resulted in over one million conversions and had a profound impact on the moral and spiritual conduct of America.*

**Duration:** 18:20

**Scripture:** Psalm 145:18, Jeremiah 29:13, Matthew 7:7, Mark 11:24, Philippians 4:6-7, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, James 5:16

**Topics:** "Revival"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the revival that took place in New York City in 1857. Jeremiah Lantier, a middle-aged businessman, played a significant role in this revival by ministering in the slums and spreading the gospel. The city was facing a financial crisis and the impending Civil War, but God used Lantier to bring hope and salvation to many. The sermon highlights testimonies of people whose lives were transformed through prayer and the power of God.

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## Transcript

God is pleased at times to send a great revival under the most unlikely means to accomplish His purposes. America in 1857 stood on a great precipice, one the result of a financial panic which weakened the entire nation. It was a bank panic which brought in New York alone several thousand individuals to financial ruin and put thousands of men across the country out of work.

Heman Humphrey lived through this crisis and wrote, Then suddenly came the crash, as if thunders from a clear sky had simultaneously broken over the whole land. Like a yawning earthquake, it shook down the palaces of the rich no less than the humble dwellings of the poor, and swallowed up all their substance. Thus men went to bed dreaming all night of their vast hoard of treasures, and woke up in the morning hopeless bankrupts.

Well, the other national crisis which was soon to befall the nation was the Civil War, in which thousands of young men would die on the battlefield and thereby suddenly enter eternity but God was active in raising up a vessel whom He could use to bring glory to His name. There was a middle-aged businessman by the name of Jeremiah Lanthier, and Jeremiah Lanthier will be the subject of our revival stories for today. He began to minister in the slums of Hell's Kitchen in New York City, and he went door-to-door distributing gospel tracts to his fellow New Yorkers.

He went into shops of commerce with the Good News of the Gospel, and stopped people on the street and spoke to them about his Lord. And as he walked the streets of the city, he noticed the looks of anxiety on the faces of the businessmen who passed by. Jeremiah Lanthier felt led to open a room in the North Dutch Church where he was a member, and begin a noonday prayer meeting for businessmen who normally took that hour off for refreshment and rest.

This burdened layman Lanthier knew God, and he knew that God heard and answered prayer, so he set a time for this prayer meeting, and the time was in the middle of the day, and he announced it by distributing handbills to people he passed on the street. The handbill said the following, How often shall I pray? As often as the language of prayer is in my heart, as often as I see my need of help, as often as I feel the power of temptation, as often as I am made sensible of any spiritual declension or feel the aggression of a worldly earthly spirit. A day prayer meeting is held every Wednesday from twelve to one o'clock in the Consistory building in the rear of the North Dutch Church corner of Fulton and Williams streets.

This meeting is intended to give merchants, mechanics, clerks, strangers, and businessmen generally an opportunity to stop and call on God amid the perplexities incident to their respective avocations. It will continue for one hour, but it is also designed for those who find it inconvenient to remain more than five or ten minutes, as well as for those who can spare a whole hour. Necessary interruption will be slight because anticipated.

Those in haste often expedite their business engagements by halting to lift their voices to the throne of grace in humble, grateful prayer. The very first noonday prayer meeting, friends, commenced on September 23rd, 1857. Jeremiah Lanthier hung a sign on the church building which simply announced prayer meeting from twelve to one o'clock.

Stop five, ten, or twenty minutes or the whole hour as your time admits. There were a million New Yorkers in 1857, but only Jeremiah Lanthier showed up for this prayer meeting. He prayed alone for the first thirty minutes, crying out to his God who both hears and answers prayers.

At twelve-thirty, the step of a solitary man was heard upon the stairs, and then another, and another, until six people came in that day to pray to the Almighty. The next meeting, there were between thirty and forty praying people. Soon, the meeting became so popular, it was decided to hold it daily instead of weekly, and in a matter of days, this room was too small to accommodate the crowds who came to pray, and a larger room had to be acquired.

This spread like wildfire throughout the city of New York, and soon there were multiple noonday prayer meetings where the spiritually hungry, hearted, cried out to their Lord. There were several rules that Jeremiah Lanthier put in place for the meeting, and one key rule was that prayers and exhortations not to exceed five minutes in order to give all opportunity and no controverted points discussed. This kept the windbags from dominating the meeting, and it kept the vision from occurring from theological or doctrinal differences.

The main purpose of the meeting was twofold, to lay hold of God in prayer and to have businessmen receive blessings and encouragement in answer to those prayers. It wasn't long before this meeting was the talk of the town. Men of all ages, classes, and characters attended.

In these meetings, one could find lawyers and physicians, merchants and clerks, bankers and brokers, mechanics and carmen, and butchers and bakers were all represented from day to day. They came just as

they were, with an expectation of a spiritual blessing. Soon the entire city was gripped with the presence of the Almighty.

Other cities began their own meetings, as travelers spoke of great work going on in New York City. From north to south, east and west, there sprung up similar noonday prayer meetings, until it seemed the entire nation was one big prayer meeting. The laws were being converted in droves, and there were many answers to prayers which resulted in multiplied praises to the most high.

Listen to some of these remarkable answers to prayer taken from historical documents. Here's one now. A father had three sons in distant and different parts of the country, all unconverted.

He brought them to the meeting as subjects of prayer. They were prayed for as only those who believed can pray. What has been the consequence? Three letters have been received from these three sons who have not communicated with each other, each given an account of his own conversion.

Here's another letter, friends. On the 7th of July, a lady tarried after the prayer meeting to say that she wished to have a request written to be presented next day for prayer for the conversion of her husband in Wisconsin. She was present and heard the prayer offered.

She then returned home to Wisconsin a few weeks later, and on arriving home, her husband said to her, I have set up family worship since you went away. She inquired of the time he had been converted, and it was the very day of the noonday request. Well, answers to these prayers, just like these, were multiplied across the entire city.

Letters after letters can be found with the testimonies of those answered prayers, and this created much excitement in the meetings as these praises were read aloud to those attendees, and it further ignited them to pray more fervently to the God of all creation. There was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in these meetings, and the very moral climate of the town seemed to be altered for good. Soon the secular newspapers of New York City were printing news daily with an edition called the Revival Extra, which detailed news of the spread and revival.

Conversions were announced in the daily press, and this helped to spread and arouse interest in the revival in faraway places as business travelers carried copies of the Revival Extra back home to the Midwest or their southern cities. From this grew a nationwide influence upon the secular press, and the revival for the national press from coast to coast began to report sensational news of how heaven had come down to earth in these noonday prayer meetings which seemed to be springing up across the land as fast as multiplying grasshoppers. I know, friends, it's hard for us today to fathom the great degree of this national revival because we ourselves have never seen anything like it, and it's almost too fantastic for us to believe, but it happened, friends.

There were significant meetings held in such places as Chicago, Boston, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Louisville, Philadelphia, and Washington. The publicized news of this work of grace spread like wildfire through the entire nation as it seemed all of America was in the very grip of eternity. Listen, friends, to a clip from a secular newspaper from Washington entitled The National Intelligencer.

This issue is dated March 20, 1858. The revivals or great awakenings continue to be the leading topic of the day. From Texas in the south to the extreme of our western boundaries and eastern limits, their influence is felt by every denomination.

Well soon, denominational magazines carried the news of the local revivals as a divine influence permeated the entire nation of America. But let me pause here, friends, to peer into the purpose of God behind all this supernatural activity in the year 1857 to 1858, which, by the way, was the last awakening this nation has had, and that was 154 years ago. You see, friends, God was busy in this revival saving hundreds of thousands of souls, many of whom would soon die on the battlefields of the Civil War.

Thus, God was bringing in a spiritual harvest before national calamity hit the scene, and it could happen that way again to America. We too may experience another great spiritual awakening before America drops off the map and becomes just a historical fact in our history books as ancient Rome has become. This is why it's so critically important for us to pray for revival in our day.

One of the very reasons why these little revival stories are being presented to you is to stir your own heart, to begin a prayer meeting for revival, and to cry out to God for Him to send revival to us again, and that we too will experience the time of the right hand of the Most High. Well, the effects of the noonday prayer meeting, or has it become to be known as the businessman's prayer revival, it was startling. It's been computed by several scholars that the outcome of this revival resulted in over one million conversions.

This event of the century had a huge impact on the religious and moral conduct of America for years to come. There was a fear of God in the land back then, people, many of whom who had been atheists before the revival, became converted and saw the reality of how a living God answers prayers and transforms lives. In the churches throughout the land there was a new spiritual vitality and the work of evangelism was heightened.

Not to be overlooked is the startling fact that many significant evangelists were called out of the 1858 awakening, men like D.O. Moody. Moody was a product of the revival and went on to become the most widely used evangelist of his day, and his influence was felt on two continents. But the primary characteristic of this great revival was prayer, simple faith, and a humble man by the name of Jeremiah Lanthier, who carried a burden with him for his fellow man.

God took the faith and prayers of Jeremiah, which ascended up to his holy nostrils, and God breathed back a mighty outpouring of His grace, which startled the entire nation, saving over one million souls. Prayer was not only central to this revival, it was the means by which this revival occurred. It eventually became known in time as the Prayer Revival of 1857 to 1858.

But we don't put much faith in prayer today. In fact, most of our churches in our land have ceased to have a weekly prayer meeting, and those who still have one, it's poorly attended because we just don't believe in prayer. At least, this is how our churches advertise it.

By the very lack of it, our sanctuaries are not filled with bended knees and broken hearts. Our sanctuaries are not flooded with tears over the lost in our communities. Our sanctuaries are mainly houses of entertainment, but Jesus Christ declared, My house shall be a house of prayer.

In this desperate hour of our nation's history, when everything moral and spiritual seems to be coming apart at the seams in both society and church, we need a national revival or we won't have a nation at all, at least one we recognize. Listen, friends, there has never been a time in the history of our great nation where we stand on the brink of destruction because of our national sins committed against a just and holy God. God has to judge America for her multiplied sins, or He isn't God.

We must fall on our faces in brokenness and humility and seek the Lord in prayer and repentance and weep and fast for God to avert His anger and instead send revival to our troubled land. Oh friends, do we realize the desperate hour in which we live? Are we playing games or are we getting serious with God? God says, return to me and I will return to you. Are we willing to repent and turn to God in prayer and supplication or will we continue to stiffen our necks and harden our hearts and await our impending doom like the dodo? Where, oh where is the man who will stand in the gap for our land today and cry out to the Almighty on our behalf and pray for a mighty outpouring of grace in our day for it is either revival or ruin for America.

Which will it be? Pray friends that it will be revival in our day. God is searching for a Jeremiah Lanphier in our day. Will it be you? By the way, the site of the old Dutch church where the noonday prayer meetings commenced is the exact vicinity in New York City where the Twin Towers stood before 9-11.

Just thought I'd point that out to you. Go and chew on that for a while.

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