

Revival Stories: John Wesley

by E.A. Johnston

The sermon emphasizes the need for revival in the church and the importance of living a sacrificial life for God.

Duration: 16:42

Scripture: Genesis 18:21, Psalm 46:10, Matthew 22:11, John 7:24, Acts 16:30, Hebrews 7:25, Hebrews 11:38

Topics: "Biography"

Description

In this sermon transcript, John Wesley recounts a powerful experience he had while preaching in May 1739. As he was preaching on the words 'be still and know that I am God,' God began to manifest His power in the open air. Over 2,000 witnesses saw people being struck to the ground and trembling in the presence of God's power. Many cried out, asking how to be saved, and within an hour, seven individuals found salvation. Wesley also faced criticism for his preaching, but he confidently defended his message and shared the importance of repentance. The transcript also highlights Wesley's tireless dedication to preaching and his gratitude for the blessings he received throughout his life.

Transcript

On many of our churches today, the word Ichabod is stamped above the doorway, advertising the fact that the glory has departed. Where is the fire emanating from our pulpits? Where is the power of the Holy Ghost in our midst? Where is the God-set prophet imbued with authority from above? The world laughs at the church today because the church lacks power from on high. For if God were in our sanctuaries in His manifest presence, our communities would be gripped with eternity.

But God is absent from our midst today because we have grieved Him away. O friends, only a heaven-sent revival will reestablish His prominence and preeminence in our sanctuaries once again. In former times, God has seemed pleased to raise up revival men.

God's eyes are continually searching the earth for those rare individuals of whom the world was not worthy, men like Moses and John the Baptist, Luther and Calvin, Whitefield and Wesley, Finney and Moody, men who live in a different atmosphere than other mortals, men who have annihilated self with the cross and whose lives are broken alabaster boxes from which fragrances arise to the heavens from the broken pieces of selflessness, self-sacrifice and self-crucifixion. God is always on the lookout for such men. John Wesley was such a man.

John Wesley once said, Give me 100 men who fear nothing but God and hate nothing but sin, and I will shake the gates of hell. And he did just that. Our subject today in our series on revival stories is the greatly used John Wesley.

Leonard Ravenhill said of John Wesley, When John Wesley died, all he left behind him was his Geneva gown, some few pound notes, and six silver spoons. But there was something else he left behind. Now, what was that? Oh, yes, it was the Methodist church.

Well, friends, John Wesley was used of God to win souls and to train others up under him to go out and do the same. The famous Methodist circuit riders who canvassed much of the American frontier with the gospel followed in Wesley's mighty footsteps. John Wesley told his men, You have one business on earth to save souls.

Unfortunately, we in the church today have placed soul winning on a back burner. Who wants to go to a conference on soul winning today? Very few would show up. A recent study even revealed that the majority of church members do not even share their faith.

The world perishes while we sit on our hands. If the carpet in your sanctuary is not discolored from the tears of your members weeping over the lost within your community, and if your members are not out actively knocking on doors and going out after sinners to tell them about a old rugged cross and the Christ who hung on that cross for sinful man, then why keep your doors open? But old John Wesley knew better. He knew that his chief purpose in life was to glorify God and to save souls.

Wesley knew what it was like to live as a lost church member. He had been a lost church member for years. His father was a pastor, and at a young age Wesley accepted Christ, but he experienced no change.

He went on to become an ordained minister in the church of England, and in 1735 he traveled as a missionary to the colony of Georgia. The only problem was he was still unsaved at this time. In his journal he wrote the following, I went to America to convert the Indians, but oh who shall convert me? Three years later he came savingly to Christ in a meeting in London on Aldersgate Street.

I have stood at that sign in Aldersgate Street which commemorates this famous event in Methodist history, and let me read you his words from his diary dated May 14, 1738. In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street where one was reading Luther's preface to the epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed.

I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. Did you notice that Wesley spoke of the change which God works in the heart? That is regeneration, where God takes a heart of stone and makes it a heart of flesh, whereby he gives new life from above. We are a new creation, old things are passed away, and that night John Wesley experienced a new birth, and his life was never the same again.

You see friends, Wesley wanted others to experience what he had. He became one of the famous soul winners the church has ever known. God used John Wesley and his friend George Whitfield in a mighty revival of religion.

In the metropolis of London, the city of Bristol, and throughout the surrounding areas of England, God was shaking England with a powerful move of grace because the country had fallen into gross immorality. Things were so bad in London, it was said that every fifth house was a gin house, and drunkenness and debauchery were commonplace in the streets. It wasn't even safe to walk the streets that night.

The state of religion was just as bad in Wesley's day. The church of England at the time had many unconverted ministers in their pulpits. They knew nothing of the new birth, and these religious men became enemies of the revival under Wesley and Whitfield.

In due time, both John Wesley and George Whitfield preached in the fields because the pulpits of their church would no longer give them access because of their messages on the new birth which they preached. John Wesley came to Bristol, England at the invitation of George Whitfield, and it was there in Bristol that Wesley first preached in the open air. Here are some details taken from his journal about this time under a revival of religion in England.

The date was May 1739. Today, Monday the 21st of May, our Lord answered for himself, for while I was enforcing these words, be still and know that I am God, he began to make bare his arm, not in a close room, neither in private, but in the open air, and before more than 2,000 witnesses, one and another and another was struck to the earth, exceedingly trembling at the presence of his power. Others cried with a loud and bitter cry, what must we do to be saved? And in less than an hour, seven persons, wholly unknown to me, till that time, were rejoicing and singing with all their might, giving thanks to the God of their salvation.

In the evening, I was interrupted at Nicholas Street, almost as soon as I had begun to speak, by the cries of one who was pricked at the heart and strongly groaned for pardon and peace, yet I went on to declare what God had already done, in proof of that important truth, that he is not willing any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Another person dropped down, close to the one who was a strong asserter of the contrary doctrine, while he stood astonished at the sight, a little boy near him was seized in the same manner. A young man who stood up behind him, fixed his eyes on him and sunk down himself as one dead, and soon began to roar out and beat himself against the ground, so that six men could scarcely hold him.

I never saw one so torn of the evil one. Meanwhile, many others began to cry out to the Savior of all, that he would come and help them, insomuch that all in the house, and indeed all in the street for some space, was in an uproar, but we continued in prayer, and before ten, the greater part found rest to their souls. John Wesley was preaching in the midst of a great revival of religion, and the power of God was upon him.

One man came up to Wesley and said, Your preaching frightens people out of their wits, to which Wesley replied, Sir, did you ever hear me preach? No, said the man. Wesley then said, How then can you judge of what you've never heard? The man answered, Sir, by common report. You see, friends, when God comes in revival, he will raise up human instruments like a Wesley or Whitefield, to further the work of grace and strengthen the revival.

These men whom God raised up, were given a great degree of unction from on high, therefore their preaching often did frighten people out of their wits, because the great truths of the Bible were proclaimed with power. On one such occasion, when Wesley was preaching, a Quaker who stood by, was not a little displeased at the dissimulation of these creatures, and was biting his lips and knitting his brows, and he dropped down as thunder struck. The agony he was in was terrible to behold.

He soon lifted up his head and cried aloud to Wesley, Now I know, thou art a prophet of the Lord. What gave Wesley and Whitefield such power? It can be contributed to three main things. Number one, there was an unusual outpouring of grace in a vital revival of religion.

Secondly, both Wesley and Whitefield were holy men of God, and thus were consecrated vessels set apart for the master's use. And lastly, both Wesley and Whitefield preached the law before grace. They believed that a sinner must be confronted with his rebellion against an almighty God.

In fact, George Whitefield would often comment that a sinner must first be brought to Mount Sinai before he can be brought to Mount Zion, and this was one of the keys to their great success as preachers of the gospel. They both knew from personal experience that a man must first receive a heart wound for sin, and be held up against the severity of God's holy law, and realize one's awful condition and need of a savior. Both Wesley and Whitefield had lived as lost church members for years before they were gloriously saved, and they knew of the change that God works in the heart in regeneration.

Well friends, allow me to read a page from Wesley's journal from the year 1762, which gives insight into his sacrificial life lived for his God. Wesley wrote all over the length and breadth of England on horseback in harsh conditions preaching the gospel. Listen to his own words.

Now let me redeem the time. I took horse at 6 a.m. The wind was piercing cold, and we had many showers of snow and rain, but the worst part of the road was scarce passable. One of our horses lay down and would go no further.

I pushed on, and before seven reached Shrewsbury. However, the horses pulled till the traces broke. I should then have walked had I been alone, though the mud was deep and the snow drove impetuously, but I could not leave my friend.

So I waited patiently till the man had made shift to mend the traces, and the horses pulled again. I finally came to the town, but the person who invited me was gone, gone out of the town at four in the morning, and I could find no one who seemed either to expect or desire my company. It remained only to go into the market house, but neither man nor woman or child cared to follow us.

The north wind roared so loud on every side and poured in from every quarter. However, before I had done singing, two or three crept in, and after them, two or three hundred, and the power of God was so present among them, I believe many forgot the storm. You see, friends, Wesley's sacrificial life was the cornerstone of the Methodist church.

He lived so others might live. He lived to preach the gospel of the Son of God. Wesley was tireless in his labors.

Listen to this journal entry he made on his 85th birthday. I, this day, enter on my 85th year, and what cause have I to praise God? As for a thousand spiritual blessings, so for bodily blessings also, to my heaven constantly, for above sixty years risen at four in the morning, to my constant preaching at five in the morning, for above fifty years? Well, God used Wesley because he lived his life on the full stretch for his God. I will close with one of the last journal entries noted in his diary, and please make note that he is eighty-six years old at the time he wrote this.

We rode immediately through a pleasant rain, which did not hinder the church from being thoroughly filled, and I believe all who had spiritual discernment perceived that it was filled with the presence of God. At

nine in the morning I preached to a select congregation on the deep things of God, and in the evening on he is able to save unto the uttermost all them that come unto God through him. On Friday the twenty-sixth I finished my sermon on the wedding garment.

Perhaps the last one I shall write. My eyes are now waxed dim. My natural force is abated.

However, while I can, I would fain do a little for God before I drop into the dust. O friends, I will need men like that today, willing to live and sacrifice so the gospel can be heard in our generation. Pray that God will be pleased to raise up a Wesley in Whitfield for our day, men who are on the out-and-out for God, and who are Christ-intoxicated men who see nothing but eternity and live for others to have life through the new birth.

Pray that God will send a revival of religion to our shores and pour out his revival blessings to our country once again.

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