

Revival Stories: Rolfe Barnard

by E.A. Johnston

E.A. Johnston's sermon on Ralph Barnard highlights the evangelist's powerful, uncompromising preaching and its profound impact on revivals in America.

Duration: 19:16

Scripture: Matthew 28:19, John 3:16

Topics: "Biography"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher recounts a powerful revival that took place in his church. Despite being unaware of what was happening, the house was packed with people on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights. During a solo performance, the Holy Spirit took control and pierced the hearts of the listeners with the truth of the gospel. This led to a powerful response, with the organist and the pastor's wife crying out in realization of their lost state. Many others, including Roman Catholics, the Sunday School superintendent, and deacons, also responded and sought God in prayer. The preacher also shares a story from his time in Texas, where he held revival services in a mining town and saw the Holy Spirit move in a powerful way.

Transcript

Well, our subject today, in our series of revival stories, is a man few are familiar with. In fact, when I mention his name to you, your response will probably be, who is that? His name is Ralph Barnard, and I just finished writing his biography, and it was hard to find people who knew much about him. But this man Barnard would use a guide to shake entire towns for God in powerful revivals.

Ralph Barnard was an evangelist who lived in relative obscurity and died without even a public notice of his death, but of whom it was said he was the human means of divine mercy to over 100,000 souls, the fruit of an itinerant preaching ministry that lasted over 40 years and canvassed much of America. Barnard was probably at his height of power in the 1950s, for it was during that decade where God moved in powerful local revivals under his searching preaching. Ralph Barnard's primary message was repentance, in a day when most preachers no longer believed repentance was necessary to faith and salvation.

His secondary message was, he must be born again, and he cried out against the watered-down gospel of his day. He died in the late 1960s, but Barnard's preaching could stir up an entire town against him. In one town, a petition was started at a local mill, and over 300 people signed it to run Barnard out of their community.

He had a vibrant radio ministry, which called all within the sound of his voice to repent. Barnard preached the true gospel of the glory of God and called lost sinners to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. He believed a man had to be born from above and washed in the blood before he could call himself a Christian.

Barnard preached against the easy-believism so prevalent in pulpits in our land. When I began to study the life and ministry of Ralph Barnard, I was shocked at how greatly this man was used of God in the salvation of souls. In many ways, he was the Azahel Middleton of his day.

In fact, Barnard and Middleton shared much in common. Both fought for orthodox religion. Both faced fierce opposition for their stance.

Both preached man's duty of immediate repentance. Both men were holy men, and they both walked closely with their gut. Listening to a Ralph Barnard sermon is an experience in itself.

When you listen to him preach, you'll be startled, alarmed, amused, convicted, and occasionally brought to tears. I tell you what, Barnard knew full well the whinings of a sinner's wicked heart, for he was once an infidel himself and knew all the excuses and objections a rebel makes so not to stack arms and throw down a shotgun at the feet of a sovereign. This man Barnard preached the gospel in its purity and proper order.

He believed in total depravity and preached often on the doctrines of ruin, redemption, repentance, and regeneration with the voice of a prophet warning of a judgment to come and a Christ who ruled with all authority from a heavenly throne. His was not a politically correct gospel. His gospel had power to save.

How can I describe his preaching and still do him justice? I don't know if it can be done, but I will try. Ralph Barnard preached with a Bible in one hand and a stick of dynamite in the other. As the demands of the holy law of God were pressed upon his hearers, a combustion began to occur.

And as the passion of the preacher rose, sparks would begin to fly. His listeners sat spellbound as they drew closer and closer to Sinai all on a smoke until they could sense the terror of the Lord and were confronted with the wickedness of their own heart. At times, this spiritual combustion could be too overwhelming to some of his hearers and they would have to be removed from a Ralph Barnard meeting on a stretcher.

This occurred on more than one occasion. Do you know anyone whose preaching does that? There were times when some of his hearers were so overcome by the truths they heard, they became insensible and landed in mental institutions. In his younger years, his preaching could literally shake an entire town.

He was a man jealous for God and His glory. But one thing was certain, if you went to a Ralph Barnard meeting, you did not leave without a strong opinion of the preacher, good or bad. His preaching disturbed people.

If I could sum up his preaching with one word, it would be disturbing. He was a disturbing preacher. He had a way of getting under your skin like a splinter beneath your finger, which gnaws at you and makes you wince.

He could get you mad, get you under conviction, get you to the foot of Calvary and at the feet of the Savior, whose fountain of blood can wash all sins away. Well, I would like to share with you some stories

about Ralph Barnard, where God moved in powerful revival. I will let him describe these scenes, which I have transcribed from some of his sermons.

Listen to some of these powerful moves of grace, as related by Evangelist Barnard. I had the flu years ago, and I closed a meeting with the flu, wracking my body on a Sunday night. I rested a little while Monday morning.

But at 11 o'clock Monday morning, I got on a train at Winston-Salem and journeyed to Illinois in my flu-weakened condition. I got there about noon on Tuesday, and the pastor met me, and took me to a room and called a doctor. The pastor told me there wouldn't be as many people to hear me preach that night, because they were having some sort of entertainment at the school.

While he apologized, the doctor treated me. I went over that night and preached. I must have preached a powerful sermon, because all hell broke loose.

The chairman of the board of deacons stood out on the steps after the service, and raved and raved, and said, That man is a false prophet, and he is going to tear our church up. I didn't know all about this. I had gone back to my room to my sickbed.

This deacon said to the pastor, Here's a check for \$400. I will give it to you. You will pay that preacher off, and don't let him preach anymore.

You know, I must have preached a powerful sermon, just one little sermon. They didn't tell me anything about that, and the next night, I went over and preached. It must have been powerful too.

I didn't understand it, but as soon as I was ready to pronounce the benediction, the pastor said, I want to meet all the deacons down in the basement. I didn't know what was going on. I slipped out the back door and went back to bed.

I was pretty sick. They told me later about how the pastor walked the floor and said, That preacher is going to ruin us, and he is going to tear our churches all to pieces, and everybody agreed with him, except an old silver-haired deacon. When they got around to him, he said, Boys, you fellows had better let that preacher alone.

He's preaching the gospel. You folks have never heard it, and you had better not put your hands on him. Well, I didn't know about all these things because I was laid up sick.

Well, Thursday night came, and the house was just packed and jammed. I wondered what was going on, but unbeknownst to me, all of this was going all over the city, and here they were coming. Friday night came, and the house was packed and jammed with folks.

I still didn't know what was going on. Saturday night came, and lo and behold, the house was crowded, and a fellow got up to sing a solo. He didn't mean to do it, but he sang in the power of the Spirit, and I saw God take a song, sung in the Spirit, and apply what I had been preaching, and pierce hearts with the truth of the gospel.

As he stood up there to sing, the Holy Ghost took charge of him. He began to sing, Love sent my Savior to die in my stead. Why should he love me so? Well, while he was singing, all hell began to pop.

The organist quit playing and screamed out, I'm lost! I'm lost! That is the sweetest cry I've ever heard this side of eternity. That is the prelude to the cry, I am saved. Well, she began running to the prayer room.

It was the pastor's wife. Then I heard somebody else sobbing, and that poor pastor cried out, Oh my God, I'm lost! I'm lost! I'm lost! I'm lost! And there he ran. Then I saw fourteen Roman Catholics.

I saw the Sunday school superintendent. I saw seven deacons. I saw, I don't know how many I saw as they screamed out before a man could finish that song.

There they were in the prayer room, on their bones, sobbing out their souls to God. The Holy Spirit took a song, and the truth of it, and made this thing personal, and brought the truth of the gospel, and pierced the hearts of those people. Some people there saw for the first time in their lives that Christ died for them, that He agonized for them, that the nails were put in His hands for them, and that He was raised for them.

Well, let me give you another remarkable account of one of the reasons why God seemed pleased to smile upon the ministry of His servant, Ralph Barnard. Ralph Barnard knew full well that God would not share His glory with another, and he never robbed God of His glory. He gave God all the credit for what God did through His meetings.

Strange incidents would occur in a Barnard meeting. At times, stretchers would be brought to carry out slain sinners. Other times, demon-possessed individuals would cry out and attack Ralph Barnard.

But one of the eeriest of all is the startling account of how God struck down and removed some church members who were opposing a Ralph Barnard meeting. There are some accounts that when the fiery evangelist Sam Jones held crusades, if there arose opposition from individuals, God removed them. Barnard had much in common with Sam Jones because of their legal backgrounds and also because of how God removed some of these opposition with sudden death.

Listen to what took place in one area where Barnard was preaching. The pastor of a church in a certain place asked me to come and hold meetings. Before I got there, seven deacons of that church had come to the pastor and said, Now, brother pastor, we are not going to oppose anything, but we don't believe in what you call evangelistic campaigns, so we will not be back until this preacher is gone and the meetings are over.

The pastor said, Well, I hate to see you take that attitude, but if that's what you want to do, I appreciate you coming to me and telling me. Well, if they had done what they said, it would have been all right, but we couldn't get a crowd for a few nights and we were hitting it pretty hard, so those fellows were glad and got to bragging about how we weren't getting anywhere in the meetings. They violated their word that they wouldn't oppose us.

The pastor came to me, and he was broken hearted and said, Brother Barnard, this is killing me. What can we do? I said, I don't know. Are you game for us to get down on our knees and ask God to save them or kill them? He agreed, and we got down on our knees and said, Lord, you know what these fellows are doing? They are ruining the meeting.

They are making fun of the gospel, the church, and the Lord Jesus Christ and God's preachers. Well, these deacons were just filling the whole town with this, and everybody was talking about how the meeting was no good, and these seven deacons were making fun of it, so we said, Lord, save them or kill them. Neither one of us was supposed to tell about that prayer, and I don't think I did, but somebody did, and

those deacons heard about it.

They just heard half of it, though, so they just had a big time. They said, those preachers up there are praying for God to kill us, and they just laughed and laughed, but we were praying for God to save them or kill them to get them out of the way. They were bucking God.

They were harming themselves against God. I think that's dangerous. They just laughed and had a big time of it, but in four days time, the pastor had seven different funerals, and they were the funerals of those seven Baptist deacons.

Every one of them died a horrible, sudden death. God kills people that harden themselves against His claims for Jesus Christ? Well, friends, as dramatic as that story is, one can just imagine the effect that those deaths had on that community as people realized the solemnity of making fun of the things of God. The sudden death of those seven obstinate deacons is startling, for it brought a whole town to face the God of the Bible.

Well, I'd like to share this last story with you, and this isn't about how God removed some men, but how God saved some men under Barnard's preaching. I'll let him tell it from his sermon entitled, God's Call. In Texas many years ago, while I was a student in Southwestern Seminary, there was a little mining town nearby, and I went one summer while I was in school and held what is called revival services.

I began the meeting there on Sunday night. I got up that night and preached. I remember I preached on hell that night and dismissed the congregation, praying that the Holy Spirit would speak to hearts and disturb people.

As we stood there, something touched my shoulder. I looked around and the old white-haired pastor stood there. His face was drenched in tears.

He said, Brother Preacher, might I say a few words? Well, of course he mightn't. He said, Folks, let's don't go home for a few minutes. I just can't let you go right now.

Well, somebody happened to look at his watch and exactly 33 minutes later, a lot had happened. The pastor stood there with his face in tears and he pointed men out and called them by their given name. I'd never seen anything like it.

He had been pastor there over 30 years. He knew them by their given name. He said, Bill, I just can't let you go tonight.

And he preached to Bill. And here came Bill, Jim, and he did that to 33 men, one by one. Nobody left.

He just called those men by name and talked to them. And here they came. Well, 33 minutes later, 33 men were lined up.

I don't know whether they got saved or not. I find out at the judgment. I simply know this.

They claimed to be saved. There was power there that night. There was somebody else there besides us.

God used that preacher to talk to those men through him. He couldn't use me, but he sure used him. We had an old-fashioned handshaking.

We had 33 men professing their faith in Christ. Well, everybody made their living in the coal mine. But Monday night, I didn't preach.

I was going to preach, but they didn't have service Monday night. For you see, at 4:26 pm that Monday afternoon, one of the mines had an explosion and caved in. And some men were buried in that mine.

And the whistle blew, and sirens and alarms went off in that little mining town. And all they did was to gather at the mine with all their equipment and they worked feverishly. And some prayed, and some cried, and some cursed.

But they worked to get down to where those men were trapped. The timekeeper, whoever is in charge of the time, consulted his books, and knew there were 33 men trapped down in that mine. They worked feverishly, and finally they got to them.

And one by one, they hauled up the bodies of those 33 men who were crushed in that mine. Every one of them were dead. And they were the 33 men that had lined up in that church that night.

And each one had received Christ. Well friends, what set Ralph Barnard's ministry apart from many of his peers was that God chose to honor his preaching with supernatural events. Ralph Barnard preached what others would not preach, and God honored that.

He never diluted the gospel to make it more palatable to his hearers. He preached a scandalous cross with the blood of Jesus. He preached a risen Lord who reigns in glory.

He saw, he called sin black and hell hot, and he pulled no punches for man's sake. Well friends, I hope these revival stories have stirred your hearts to pray for God to move in revival in our day. Pray that God will raise up some men like Ralph Barnard, who won't compromise the gospel, and who will call lost sinners to repentance and faith.

Pray that God will send America some revival men.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/24/SID24551.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ea-johnston/revival-stories-rolfe-barnard/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net