

# When Revival Bypasses the Established Church

by E.A. Johnston

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*When the church has sinned and refuses to repent and turn back to the God of the Bible, then God will work outside of it.*

**Duration:** 16:52

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 2:1

**Topics:** "Established Church"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker criticizes the institutional church in America for being complacent and conforming to society. He compares the current state of the church to the people of God in the book of Jeremiah who had forsaken God and set up their own idols. The speaker believes that if a revival were to happen in America, it would likely occur outside of the established church. He emphasizes the need for bold preachers who are not afraid to share the gospel and who are dedicated to prayer and fasting.

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## Transcript

I have spent decades in the study of revival history, and as I have researched great movements of God in spiritual awakenings throughout history, I have noticed there are times when God moves in the church and times when God moves outside the church. Allow me to elaborate. There are times when revival occurs in the churches and church life is revitalized and brought back to New Testament vitality.

This occurred in America during the Second Great Awakening under the preaching of Asahel Nettleton and Charles Finney where the spiritual life of the church was revived. This occurred as well in Wales in 1904 during what became known as the Welsh Revival and a young man by the name of Evan Roberts was the primary figurehead of that revival which occurred in the life of the churches throughout Wales. But there are other times when God moves outside the doors of church buildings, times when God has to bypass the institutional church because the church is so dead and so sound asleep, because the church has sinned and refuses to repent and turn back to God, because the church is full of spiritual pride and will not bow her stubborn neck to the King of Kings.

It's during those times that God will send a religious awakening outside the doors of the established church. This occurred in the days of Whitefield and Wesley during the revival of religion of the mid-18th century in Great Britain. Even though both John Wesley and George Whitefield were ordained priests in

the Church of England, they had to be moved beyond its doors for God to work through them in a mighty revival of religion through field preaching.

The established church was so sound asleep that when revival came, they could not discern the rustling of the wind in the tops of the mulberry trees, so they fought against it, they strived against it. The main persecutors of the revival were bishops of the established church. The Church of England in that day was so spiritually dead that the majority of its ordained ministers were unconverted men who loved their card games, the tavern, and hunting over the things of God and the church.

Soon, pulpits were closed to George Whitefield and John Wesley. It was George Whitefield who first took to the fields with the sky as his sounding board and the fields as his sanctuary. Listen to the comments of J.C. Ryle, who was an ordained minister in the Church of England.

Listen to him describe his own denomination during the days of Whitefield. Ryle wrote concerning Whitefield, He loved the church in which he had been ordained. He gloried in her articles.

He used her prayer book with pleasure, but the church did not love him and so lost the use of his services. The plain truth is that the Church of England of that day was not ready for a man like Whitefield. The church was too much asleep to understand him and was vexed at a man who would not keep still and let the devil alone.

Listen, friends, when you study the revival of religion under Whitefield and Wesley, it's plain to see how God moved in a great spiritual awakening, but in doing so, God bypassed the established church, which so stood against God at the time. My message this afternoon is entitled, When Revival Bypasses the Established Church, and my passage today is found in the book of Jeremiah, chapter 2. We will be in verses 1-13. You may turn in your Bibles there now, friends.

Like I said, there are times when God sends revival into the church and revives it back to a New Testament vitality where prayer and evangelism and holiness are central to the life of the church. And there are other times, as in the days of Whitefield, where God has to move outside the doors of the established church because the institutional church is backslidden in sin and unrepentant and haughty and proud. Allow me to say, friends, that this describes the day in which we live in the West.

The institutional church in America is so fast asleep on her pills of conformity, so hell-bent on remaining unrepentant and content to enlarge her bulging campus with newer and bigger buildings, that if a George Whitefield appeared today and tried to preach in her pulpits, he would be thrown out as a heretic and hotly persecuted by the established church of our day, friends. I want to read us our passage from the book of Jeremiah, because it so aptly describes the condition of the established church in America today. This striking passage describes a people of God who have forsaken the God of the Bible and have set up their own idols of conformity to the pagan society in which they lived.

Her priests had no power or authority. Her worship was noxious in the nostrils of a holy God. Listen to our passage now as I read us the word of God as found in Jeremiah chapter 2. Moreover, the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.

Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the firstfruits of his increase, all that devour him shall offend, evil shall come upon them, saith the Lord. Hear ye the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. Thus saith the Lord, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain? Neither said they, Where is the Lord that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt? And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof, and the goodness thereof, but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made my heritage an abomination.

The priests said not, Where is the Lord, and they that handle the law, knew me not, the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit. Wherefore, I will yet plead with you, saith the Lord, and with your children's children will I plead, for pass over the isles of Shittim and see, and send unto Kadar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed her gods, which are yet no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit.

Be ye astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid. Be ye very desolate, saith the Lord, for my people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

That, friends, is not only a sad picture of America, once greatly favored by God, because America once greatly feared God, and it's a sad picture of the church in America as well, tied to her idols, and estranged from the living God of the Bible because of pride. Because of sin, and her refusal to turn back to God through repentance and a seeking of him. Priests who pray not, churches with no regular prayer meeting, pastors transgressing against God instead of serving God, and the established church as a whole walking after things which do not profit.

An institutional church that has not only forsaken the God of the Bible, the fountain of living waters, but an established church that has hewn out her own cisterns with a perverted gospel and a worldly worship. The church in America is leaking today, friends, and I'm afraid she has leaked out all her power and influence through her broken cisterns. The power that she once had in this land is gone.

I am contacted on a regular basis by young men who've been called to God to preach the word of God. These young men are appearing in cities and towns all over America. They are itinerant preachers and street evangelists, missionaries to their communities.

They're working outside of the institutional church because the institutional church is too asleep to take notice of them. They are firebrands. They are full of zeal and hunger for God and the word of God, and they are full of the spirit of God, friends.

They live in the West Coast, the East Coast, the heartlands, and the South. They contact me and tell me of their tent meetings. They tell me of their street evangelism.

They tell me of their vain search for a church in their community with any spiritual vitality. Most churches would not even allow these young men the use of their pulpits, so God has been pleased to deny the church the use of their services. They are God-called men on fire for God and thirsty for souls, and they're popping up everywhere to the glory of God.

This excites me, friends, what God's doing outside the church in America today. Listen, friends, God will not allow himself to not have a witness. God will raise up his own brand of preachers if seminary-trained ones are failing to do the job.

God will call out a band of young men to preach the old doctrines of repentance and regeneration to this generation of hell-bound teenagers. Even though there is a famine of hearing the word of God, and many of our churches in the land, there's no famine, friends, for hearing it under tents or on box crates on street corners throughout this land of bold preachers shouting over the noise of traffic, of bold preachers who aren't too lazy to get out and knock on doors and share the gospel with the lost, of bold preachers who have saturated themselves in prayer and who have shut themselves up with the God of prayer in seasons of prayer and fastings, men who fear God and not man, evangelists who don't have to worry about watering down the gospel message just to get a good love offering. These are firebrands consumed with eternity and focused on eternity, and God is raising them up everywhere, friends.

It's our job to get behind them and support them with our money and with our prayers. Don't let them starve because they are preaching the truth. Find you such a man and support him, friend.

Pray for him. Encourage him. These young preachers are America's only hope.

Do you hear me? These young preachers are America's only hope to turn this nation back to God. God is raising up a band of preachers. Outside the church and using them outside the established church, the old sawdust trails getting some footprints once again.

Sinners are crying out, what must I do to be saved? God is at work in the open air, friends. Street corners have become his pulpit and city lanes his sanctuary. This is a day in which the established church is so fast asleep and so far away from the heart of God that if Jesus Christ appeared in the flesh and walked up to it, knocked on their door, they would open the door and turn him away through their failure of even recognizing him.

I really believe, friends, that the next great revival in America will take place outside this established church because the established church, for the most part, is too far gone to be aroused. She's too haughty. She's too proud to humble herself and turn back to God.

I really believe that if things don't change in the life of our denominations, that God will send revival and he will bypass the established church in America. I believe the established church will become the national church of America's God-hating government, just like the three self-churches, the government-run church in China. That's where things are heading in this country, friends.

I really believe that with my whole heart. So what can we do if the priest of the Lord won't call an assembly and weep between the porch and the altar for the sins of the land and confess the sins of the church and turn back to God? Then God will raise up a remnant outside of the apostate church. God will do a new thing, as he has done in former times when the church of England laying her sins and her apostasy.

God raised up a Wesley and a Whitfield to work beyond her doors, and thus vital Methodism was born. The circuit riders went over all over the place over young America with hearts on fire for God, handing out Bibles and tracts like water to thirsty men. All I know, friends, is this.

When the church has sinned and refuses to repent and turn back to the God of the Bible, then God will work outside of it. I will leave you with these words, which describe men of former days who were mightily

used of God in those days. Pray for such men to be continually raised up in our day, friends, men such as these.

The apostle Paul, Luther, Wesley, Whitfield, Knox, Edwards, Finney, Spurgeon, Moody, each shared a common denominator of fire in their belly. They were each so eaten up with the gospel and thirsty for Christ and filled with the Holy Ghost. They could not stand idly by while others perished.

They sought nothing but eternity, worshipped the Holy God and served the risen Christ, living not for earth nor its gains, but living only for heaven and its rewards. When they preached, they linked the devil with sin and the cross with salvation. They preached hell and its fire, and Christ in him crucified.

Not one of them feared king, queen, or pope, and not one of them sought the compliments of men. The great God of heaven send us some more of those men today.

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