

A Call to Extraordinary Prayer for Revival

by Erroll Hulse

Erroll Hulse calls for extraordinary prayer as the essential means to seek revival in the church amidst spiritual lethargy and need.

Scripture: Psalm 85:6, Isaiah 62:1, Isaiah 62:6, Ezekiel 36:37, Zechariah 12:10, Acts 1:14, 1 Corinthians 15:58

Topics: "Revival Prayer", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Erroll Hulse emphasizes the urgent need for revival in the church, highlighting the historical significance of outpourings of the Spirit and the detrimental effects of spiritual lethargy and powerlessness. He stresses the importance of fervent, persevering prayer as the principal means for seeking revival, citing biblical examples like Pentecost and the Second Great Awakening. Hulse calls for specific, informed prayers for spiritual awakening globally, urging believers to continue faithful work in preaching the truth, evangelism, and missions even in the absence of revival. He encourages believers to persist in prayer for revival, understanding that it is God's prerogative and emphasizing the need for fervor and perseverance in seeking the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

Concerning fervent, persevering prayer, the prophet Isaiah writes, "I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest, and give Him no rest, until He establishes Jerusalem and makes her a praise of the earth." (Isa. 62:6-7) Revival is a reality about which we must give ourselves no rest, and the LoRn no rest, until He comes and makes His church the praise of all the earth.

The Desperate Need. Throughout history, the church has been revived and enlarged through outpourings of the Spirit. Jonathan Edwards, a leader in the First Great Awakening, writes: "It may be observed that, from the fall of man to our day, the work of redemption in its effect has mainly been carried on by remarkable pourings out of the Spirit of God . . . at special seasons of mercy." Without periodic, extraordinary visitations of God, the church inevitably degenerates.

Nearly a century has passed since the church has experienced widespread revival. Although the gospel has advanced into more places and nations than ever before, the church faces defeat in many ways. Glowing statistics can never measure the spiritual climate of the church.

In our generation we have increasingly suffered from spiritual lethargy and powerlessness. There is a high percentage of weak and lukewarm Christians in western churches who evidence little interest in growing in grace and knowledge. The church may be bustling with activity and at the same time be infiltrated and permeated with the world's thinking and doing. It is sometimes the case that our bright forms of worship camouflage a dead spiritual condition.

Today the church world-wide is struggling. The impact of our churches upon the spiritual state of the world has, with all too few exceptions, been minimal. The missionary effort among us is feeble. The enemies of the gospel are winning the day in almost every area of the world.

Our paramount need is for heaven-sent revivals of the kind that have adorned the history of the church. Nothing less than the powerful work of the Holy Spirit on a massive scale will meet the desperate spiritual poverty of our age, and remove the gross darkness that covers the nations. Only the manifestation of God in the midst of His people can give the church victory, making her the "praise of the earth."

The Divine Means. What should we emphasize in such spiritually degenerated circumstances? Prayer! This is the principal means of grace to be employed by the Lord's people. Prayer occupies a primary place in the advance of all the Lord's work, and especially in the quest for revival.

Jonathan Edwards comments that when God has something very great to accomplish for His church, it is His will that there should precede it the extraordinary prayers of His people, quoting from Ezekiel 36:37 "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do this for them." In Zechariah 12:10 it is revealed that, when God is about to accomplish great things for His church, He will begin by a remarkable pouring out of "the Spirit of grace and supplication." It is the invariable constitution of the kingdom of heaven that blessings of great magnitude are not imparted except to prayers of the deepest urgency.

History demonstrates this principal. The common precursor to revivals has been prevailing prayer. Pentecost, which was the first Christian revival, followed ten days of intense prayer characterized by whole-hearted unity (Acts 1:14, 2:1-4).

Before the Second Great Awakening (late 1850s), Jeremiah Lamphier called a prayer meeting in downtown New York. Within six months 10,000 businessmen were praying for revival, and within two years about 2,000,000 people were added to the churches.

The same pattern is found before the 1859 revival in Ulster, Ireland. James McQuilkin and three others began to meet in a school house every week for prayer and Bible study. They kept themselves warm with armfuls of peat gathered on the way to the school house every Friday evening. While peat warmed their bodies, the Spirit kindled the fire in their hearts. By the end of 1858, the participants at the prayer meeting had grown to fifty. Intercession without distraction to other subjects was made for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on themselves and the country. Their prayers and possibly many more were wonderfully answered in 1859 when an estimated 100,000 were added to the churches in Ulster.

These accounts and many others illustrate prayer as the genesis of revival. The beginning of a time of revival invariably has been marked by quickening of the ordinary prayer meetings, resulting in new vitality, more participation, more sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and more unction in intercession.

Therefore, in times of special need and of the church's weakness, there is a biblical and historical warrant to resort to extraordinary prayer for revival. Isn't spiritual apathy and powerlessness in the church today a

crisis which calls for urgent prayer?

We must recognize, however, that prayer is a spiritual gift, something that cannot be created artificially or regimented. We are not to think that we can organize prayer as if we are in control. The very ability to pray with unction and faith is given by the Holy Spirit, and although that activity largely precedes revival, prayer also is an integral part of revival.

Faithful Servants. While there are times when our prayers may be general or even unutterable groans, it is also important to be specific. Praying for spiritual awakening must be informed, by using resources such as Operation World, by Patrick Johnstone. Prayer meetings for revival should be fueled with relevant up-to-date information for intelligent petitions. We should not confine our intercessions to our own church or denomination or nation, but should intercede for world-wide spiritual awakening.

Our prayers are real only if we live them. As we earnestly seek God for revival, we must not forsake the essential tasks of the church: preaching the truth, evangelism and a vital interest in and support for missions. We must pray for revival in the context of faithful work. (I Cor. 15:58) It is those who labor hard in evangelism who are able to pray most fervently for spiritual awakening.

The absence of revival is no excuse to discontinue our active evangelistic and missionary endeavors. The notion that nothing worthwhile can be done until revival comes can lead to the worst kind of lethargy. Jesus promises to be with us in our efforts until the end of the world, revival or no revival! All prayer for revival must be accompanied by faithfulness in fulfilling the commission, which is binding upon us all, to reach everyone as effectively as we can with the gospel.

Do Not Keep Silent. Let the desperate need for revival the impoverished spiritual condition of the church, the darkness in the world permeate our souls. May we profoundly realize the prevailing power of prayer. Let our fervent desires and longings for the manifestation of Christ's kingdom overflow in extraordinary intercession, with cries for special mercy. Jonathan Edwards wrote, "there is no way that Christians in a private capacity can do so much to promote the work of God and advance the kingdom of Christ, as by prayer."

We must not expect revival to come easily and quickly. Do not be discouraged if the results are not immediate; revival is God's prerogative. As God has been pleased to specially manifest His glory in the past and in the present in some countries, may we be inspired to persevere in crying, "O LORD, will you revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you." (Ps. 85 6)

When the vision of Christ's- glory, demonstrated in the salvation of souls, becomes an intense desire in our hearts, that is especially the time when we must pray with fervour for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in revival. "For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not keep quiet, until her righteousness goes forth like brightness, and her salvation like a torch that is burning." (Isa. 62:1) I implore you to be one who, in our desperate day, urgently and persistently seeks the Lord in extraordinary prayer for widespread spiritual awakening, that God's glory would be magnified in His church and in all the earth.

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