

# Prepare the Way

by Glenn Meldrum

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of preparation in revival, citing examples from history and the Bible, and warns of judgment and spiritual decline if the church does not prepare.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 42:1, Psalm 63:1, Isaiah 40:3, Matthew 11:11-12, James 4:8

**Topics:** "Spiritual Revival", "Heart Preparation"

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## Description

Glenn Meldrum preaches on the essential truth that preparation always precedes revival, emphasizing the need for passionate hearts for God lived out through prayer, repentance, and holiness. He highlights the Hebrides Awakening and the Moravian Revival as examples of passionate preparation leading to divine visitation. The sermon delves into the New Testament's demonstration of preparation preceding spiritual awakenings, starting with John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus and the subsequent revivals of the early church. It stresses the importance of being a voice crying in the wilderness, yearning for the Lord, and making straight paths for Him as crucial steps in preparing for divine visitation.

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## Transcript

Whenever God's people grow desperate for His manifest presence, they return to the simple truths that govern revival. One of those unalterable truths is that preparation always precedes revival! Preparation begins with a passionate heart for God that is lived out through prayer, repentance and holiness. A desire for revival that does not produce action only generates a profitless fantasy.

The Hebrides Awakening is a wonderful example of the passionate preparation that births revival. This move of the Spirit was conceived through many praying saints. "Two such prayer warriors were Peggy and Christine Smith of Barvas on Lewis Island. They were 82 and 84 years of age, one blind and the other arthritic. Their poor health did not allow them to be in church as often as they liked but their home was a sanctuary, a place where they daily met with God in prayer" (Meldrum, 8).

One day while the Smith sisters were in prayer, God gave Peggy a vision that revival was coming to their spiritually dead church. The sisters contacted their pastor and compelled him to begin praying for the glory of God to be revealed. The pastor, Rev. James Murray MacKay, secured seven other men to pray two nights a week in a local barn from 10 o'clock at night until four or five in the morning. They covenanted with God, and each other, to seek His face until He stepped down out of heaven. The Lord heard their cry and revealed Himself beyond anything they ever imagined.

"The remarkable thing about this visitation of God was that simultaneously as God moved in the church, the Spirit also swept through the town and areas around. Everywhere people came under great conviction of sin. Atheists and Communists, slain helplessly under awful conviction of sin, prayed for hours that they might find peace of mind. Drunkards, standing at the saloon bar, trembled, dropped their beer upon the floor and cried for God to save them. Businessmen, who never darkened the doors of a church; schoolteachers, correcting their papers; housewives in their homes, even the herring fishermen out upon the sea--were all gripped by deep conviction of sin. People felt some strange, internal compelling to go to the church where they could find relief. They felt wonderment and misery alike. The hills were soon black with people streaming to the church from all directions" (Murphy, 9).

The much earlier Moravian Revival of 1727 is another example of preparing the way for divine visitation. One little church in Germany, awakened by the Spirit's holy fire, did more in the evangelization of the world in twenty years than the entire evangelical church combined did in 200 years (Pratney, 306). Dr. Kenneth Pfohl pointed out their diligence in seeking a new Pentecostal outpouring: "The great Moravian Pentecost was not a shower of blessing out of a cloudless sky. It did come suddenly, as suddenly as the blessing of its greater predecessor in Jerusalem, when the Christian Church was born. Yet, for long, there had been signs of abundance of rain, though many recognized them not. In short, the blessing of the thirteenth of August 1727, was diligently and earnestly prepared for" (Greenfield, 86). This move of the Spirit was not the product of time and chance, nor was the results that followed.

The New Testament is a book of revival that demonstrates the principle that preparation precedes spiritual awakenings. Revival began with John the Baptist who prepared the way for the Messiah. Through signs and wonders Jesus took the spiritual outpouring further and prepared the way for the revivals of the early church. He established revival as the basis for normal Christianity and sent the Spirit after His ascension to accomplish it. The revival that originated on the day of Pentecost and continued as narrated in the book of Acts is the standard by which the church is to judge her spiritual life. The New Testament Epistles are letters written to churches birthed through revival. Considering the church's humble beginnings, it was only the power of the Holy Spirit that caused the gospel to spread like wildfire throughout the Roman Empire.

Preparing for the Messiah to come to His people can clearly be seen in the life and ministry of John the Baptist. John was the fulfillment of the prophecy proclaimed in Isaiah 40:3-5 which Luke quoted:

As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God's salvation'" (Lk. 3:4-6).

We will now examine the first three points of this prophecy and how they relate to the saints preparing the way of the Lord in our own day.

## 1. A VOICE OF ONE CALLING

The Lord has chosen to use frail people to advance His kingdom through the power of the Holy Spirit. For revival to come there must be a holy instrument that the Lord can use. Someone must be the voice crying in the wilderness to a sleeping church and a perishing world. How can a person repent if he does not comprehend he is a sinner, or be saved if he does not know that he is in danger of hell? How can a man live a holy life if he has not been taught what holiness entails? In addition, how will the church know that God desires to revive her unless she realizes that she is spiritually dead and in need of reviving? A person

who is spiritually comatose will never be able to discern his own situation. So it is with the church. Someone must have the courage to warn a lukewarm church of her sin. Otherwise, she will suffer the consequences of her transgressions.

Jesus heralded John the Baptist as the greatest prophet (Mt. 11:11). He said, "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully (violently, KJV) advancing, and forceful (violent, KJV) men lay hold of it" (Mt. 11:12). In other words, only men aggressively moved with the heart of God, by the Spirit of God, can advance the kingdom of God. A watered down gospel may build large congregations, but never Christ's kingdom.

The cry of every believer, and especially every preacher, should be "Prepare the way for the Lord!" We are called to unashamedly stand among our families and neighbors, in the streets of urban decay, and even in our churches and cry out, "Prepare the way for the Lord!" The critical need of the hour is for the raising up of modern day John the Baptists, saturated with the love and compassion of Christ.

An old Chinese proverb says, "If you want to know what water is, don't ask a fish." A fish only knows life in water. He is unable to perceive his own situation since he lives in it day in and day out. A voice must come to him from the outside to make known to him his true condition. This was the Baptist's ministry. He was separate from the people in their passions and pride, separate from them in their religion and government, separate morally and spiritually, separate from worldly ambitions because he was separated exclusively unto God. As a result, John could see the reality of a sinful people who were at war with their Creator even though they believed they were "normal" and right with Him.

When there is no one to cry, "Prepare the way for the Lord," you may be certain there will be NO revival. Before revival can come, Christians must first be separated unto Christ, and then separated from sin and the world. It is vital that they live free from the passions of fame, wealth, and selfish ambitions while being rich in intimate fellowship with the Savior. Their lives must be fully yielded to Jesus, which means they will follow Him no matter the cost. Then they will begin to know the heart of God and the things that break His heart. Then they will weep over the nation like the prophet Jeremiah. "Since my people are crushed, I am crushed; I mourn, and horror grips me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people? Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people" (Jer. 8:21-9:1).

Jeremiah was broken over the spiritual condition of his people. When he touched the heart of God he was transformed into a man of compassion. This drove him to his knees in desperate cries for the people to come to repentance. It also compelled him to warn them about their true spiritual condition. This was the love of God operating through the man. Such lives are instruments for revival. Saints who possess the heart of God will proclaim with courage, love and deep humility, "Prepare the way for the Lord!"

## 2. PREPARE THE WAY

Before a person, or a people, will prepare the way of the Lord they must yearn for Him and His appearing. Although God desires every believer to prepare for His coming, He will respond to the efforts of a few. This is not a justification for the indifference that plagues the majority of Christians in this nation. It does offer a tremendous hope to those faithful few aching for the Lord to rend the heavens. The character of the bold, yet humble John the Baptist is an encouraging example of a man who prepared the way for the Messiah. His purpose was clear, his message distinct, his sacrifice complete, his faith unwavering, his passion ablaze, his obedience to the death. These same qualities are necessary to accomplish an equivalent work

today.

To understand Isaiah 40:3-5, and John's ministry, we must visualize what the prophesy portrayed from the cultural point of view of that era. In many ancient civilizations, a king would visit the villages of his realm to discern the condition of his kingdom and institute justice according to his own will. With undisputable power he would dispense mercy or wrath, blessings or curses, life or death. Emissaries would go before the king to prepare for his coming. A wise community, privileged to be visited by their king, would diligently prepare the way. They would clean the streets, paint their houses, and plan for the festivities. Every obstacle that would displease their king and incur his wrath would be removed.

Multitudes came to hear the Baptist preach and repent of their sins. John did everything within his power to ready the people for their King. He pointed to Jesus, proclaiming Him the Christ, the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn. 1:29). John prepared the way for Jesus with the message of repentance. Jesus took the message farther by saying He was the Way. Filled with compassion He touched multitudes of hurting people. Yet when the end came, those same crowds who were fed and healed by Him cried, "Crucify Him."

Everyone will not embrace the move of God when it comes. Revival means mercy for some and judgment for others. The annals of history record that the majority of Israel refused to accept the revival God offered them. Those that rebelled against their Messiah brought upon themselves the wrath of the Almighty. Jesus prophesied the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem because they did not recognize who He was (Lk. 19:41-44). When Christ stood before the Roman governor and the Jewish people, Pilate strove to release Him, but the masses cried out, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" (Mt. 27:25). And so it was.

In 70 A.D. Jerusalem and the Temple were utterly destroyed by the Roman armies under Titus, son of Emperor Vespasian. The blood of the parents and their children came upon them for not accepting their rightful King. "Though God is longsuffering in the face of backsliding, there comes a time when His patience is exhausted. Ultimately it is either revival or catastrophe" (Coleman, Dry Bones, 47-48). Revival is the mercy of God freely offered to sinful humanity. Judgment is the unfortunate result of men and women rejecting His love.

Those who God uses to prepare the way for revival have the joy of witnessing vast numbers of people saved and delivered from lives of sin and rebellion. They will also see a greater portion of the people reject Jesus as Israel did two thousand years ago. The responsibility of those who prepare the way is only to be a voice crying in the wilderness. What the people do when God rends the heavens is their own responsibility. The preparers of the way are called to be faithful to the Lord, to His message and to the calling no matter the response of the populous.

#### Results Of Not Preparing

There are at least two forms of judgment that takes place when the church does not prepare for revival. The first happens when God turns both the church and the world over to their own sinful desires (Rom. 1:28). Our indifference in seeing a move of the Spirit is proof of our lukewarmness. As Christians compromise their faith and morals they become more worldly and self-absorbed. Sin and compromise silences the church's voice, strips her of her authority and destroys her testimony. The unsaved are then left without the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit working through a holy church. Without this restraining influence secular society grows in wickedness. When God removes His protective hand from His people, the human race degenerates to baser lifestyles.

An honest assessment of the spiritual and moral condition of the American church exposes the raw truth that this judgment has overtaken us. Lack of the Spirit in the church has produced a lack of conviction over sin. Lack of conviction becomes a type of silent approval of unholy practices. Fornication is largely ignored in the church. Homosexuals can sit comfortably week after week in supposed evangelical churches without the slightest bit of concern for their ungodly behaviors. Pornography sweeps through the ranks of professed disciples from pastors to parishioners. The explosive divorce rate among acclaimed Christians is devastating subsequent generations. Because this sin is rarely addressed from a Scriptural perspective, divorce is now commonly accepted, and even endorsed, by the church and clergy. A plague of contention and strife runs rampant through congregations rather than being habitations of healing and peace. Nearly one third of churches seeking a pastor are doing so because they drove out the former pastor through acts of rebellion. This is just the tip of the iceberg.

There is another judgment that is far more severe than being turned over to our own sin; it is God withdrawing His Spirit from His people. Tragically, the majority of churches and Christians in western civilization suffer under this most disastrous of judgments and do not even comprehend that it has swallowed them up. Spiritually speaking, "Ichabod" has been stamped over their doorposts, which means the glory of God has departed from them (1 Sam. 4:21). For Christians to live contentedly without revival means they are either satisfied to live without God's manifest presence, have never know there is more to be received, or do not want God upsetting their lifestyles. One way or another, they are not seriously disturbed that God is not vitally present among them.

The deep moral decay of our nation is further proof of a prodigal church. She has ceased to be salt and light in this world. As salt, the church is to preserve society from moral and spiritual decay. This she has failed to do. Compromise has been her downfall. A syncretism (the blending of two beliefs to create a distinct third belief) has occurred between humanism and Christianity resulting in the formation of a third religion: the religion of American Cultural Christianity. This new religion, which is actually not new, is far removed from the Biblical version. It is a hedonistic, pleasure driven religion that is self-reliant and self-centered. It makes man the center of all things, happiness and prosperity the prize, and God the subservient slave to their desires.

The moral and spiritual decline stated above can be turned around if we will see our sin and repent. Only the power of God can transform the church and secular society. We are in enormous need of voices crying in the spiritual wastelands of our nation. Those who prepare the way for divine visitation are average people who thirst for the Living God. They will do whatever it takes to see His glory revealed. The dead are hard to motivate, but desperate people live desperate lives that can shake their world. The Lord does not need our talent, intelligence, wealth or position. He is looking for radically surrendered people who will passionately pursue Him no matter the cost.

### 3. MAKE STRAIGHT PATHS FOR HIM

Driving west on highway 10 across Texas is a long, arduous journey of more than eight hundred and fifty miles. It is a dry and rugged landscape. Imagine how difficult it was for the first pioneers to travel that territory and build a simple dirt road by sheer manpower. Think of the perseverance and determination it took to accomplish the task. Those who originally built the road were not the only ones who profited from it. Everyone who followed thereafter would benefit whether they understood the original cost or not.

Building a spiritual highway so God will reveal His glory is the responsibility of every Christian. Yet this duty offers a tremendous blessing. Making "straight paths for Him" requires us to diligently seek the Lord. The prize of Christianity is Jesus Himself. Intimate fellowship with the Savior is the greatest privilege offered to the human race. This truth moved the psalmist to proclaim, "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you" (Ps. 63:1-3). David knew sweet fellowship with his Creator and passionately ran after Him, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" (Ps. 42:1-2).

Rees Howells, a man in hot pursuit of God, daily enjoyed the gift of intimate fellowship with the Master. His entire Christian life was defined by one concept--making a straight path for Him. He did everything within his ability to live a surrendered life so the power of the Holy Spirit could flow through him. After the birth of the Howells' first son, Rees felt an overwhelming burden for the people of Africa. He prayed that the Lord would send someone to reach them with the Gospel. The Howells told the Lord they would be willing to raise a missionary's child if it would allow that couple to freely minister in Africa since the health conditions were dangerous for young children. Instead, the Lord asked Rees and his wife if they would give their only son to relatives and go to Africa themselves. The Lord promised that in exchange for their sacrifice and obedience He would give them 10,000 souls. Mr. and Mrs. Howells lovingly obeyed the exceedingly difficult call and prepared the way for the Lord to visit South Africa. As a result, the fires of revival burned through them.

Mr. Howells visited Bethany, where the Queen of Swaziland lived. The first service lasted for thirteen hours. All the time he was dealing with the unsaved. The presence of the Holy Spirit increased as time went on. Rees stated, "On the third day, the power was there! It wasn't the preaching, it was the power."

"The Queen of Swaziland sent for me. She asked why her people were going after my God. I told her it was because they had met the living God, and had forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life. I told her that God had one Son, and He gave Him to die for us; and we had one son, and had left him to tell the people of Africa about God. She was much affected by hearing that my wife and I loved her people more than we loved our own son. She allowed me to have a private meeting with her chief men, but said I must not look at her, but speak as if I were talking to them! Later, in the chapel, the power of God was on the meeting, and when I tested it, fifty stood up, including the young queen, the daughter-in-law of the reigning queen.

"When we came back some time later the old queen asked to see us privately. She told us that she had just lost her daughter, who had become a Christian, and she had died in perfect peace, trusting Jesus. She seemed very much affected, and added that she too, in her heart, had accepted the Saviour" (Grubb, 174-175). Those who enter into a deep abiding relationship not only enjoy intimate fellowship with the Father, but will also be people who "make straight paths for Him" to visit as evidenced by this account.

The Lord used Rees Howells in Africa because he first prepared the way in his own life for God to come to him by removing anything that hindered His appearing. An intense love for the Savior compelled him to walk in obedience and holiness, which resulted in the Spirit coming to the people in an extraordinary manner. "The Sunday was October 10--my birthday--and as I preached in the morning you could feel the Spirit coming on the congregation. In the evening down He came. I shall never forget it. He came upon a young girl, Kufase by name, who had fasted for three days under conviction that she was not ready for the

Lord's coming. As she prayed she broke down crying, and within five minutes the whole congregation were on their faces crying to God. Like lightning and thunder the power came down. I had never seen this even in the Welsh Revival. I had only heard about it with Finney and others. Heaven had opened, and there was no room to contain the blessing. I lost myself in the Spirit and prayed as much as they did. All I could say was, 'He has come.' We went on until late in the night; we couldn't stop the meeting. What He told me before I went to Africa was actually taking place, and that within six weeks" (Grubb, 167). God gave Rees and his wife well over the 10,000 souls He promised. What more profitable endeavor could Christians pursue than to pave the way for the Spirit to visit frail humanity?

This principle of preparing the way for us to go to Him and for the Lord to come to us is similar to what James taught when he wrote, "draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (Jam. 4:8; NKJV). In essence, the Lord is telling us that if we will take a step towards Him He will take a million mile leap towards us. Those believers who have abandoned their lives in a radical pursuit to gain intimacy with Christ will be used by the Spirit to prepare the way for His glory to fall upon the church and a dying culture. Jesus is waiting, even longing, for us to come near to Him so He can draw near to us. Yes, preparation precedes revival! This is an unalterable fact.

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