

Rescue the Perishing

by Glenn Meldrum

The sermon emphasizes the importance of rescuing the perishing and caring for the dying, as seen in the heart of God through the life and mission of Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Isaiah 53:5, Amos 6:6, Matthew 3:2, Matthew 28:19, Luke 12:49, Luke 19:10, 2 Corinthians 5:20, Ephesians 5:1, Philippians 3:10

Topics: "Evangelism", "Revival"

Description

Glenn Meldrum preaches about the driving passion of Fanny Crosby, a blind hymn writer, to win the lost to Christ, emphasizing the urgency to rescue the perishing and care for the dying. The sermon delves into the heart of God as seen through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, highlighting His mission to seek and save the lost. It challenges Christians to embody the compassion of Christ, become modern-day John the Baptists, and cry out in the wilderness to warn the ungodly and call them to repentance. The sermon stresses the need for revival and reformation in the church, urging leaders to set the example by leading with a passion for the lost.

Transcript

Fanny Crosby, the blind hymn writer of the late nineteenth century, had a driving passion to win the lost to Christ. This burden compelled her to tell the salvation story to all who would listen, whether it was a homeless man at the Bowery Mission in New York City or a stranger on the streets. Once while addressing a group of workmen in Cincinnati, Ohio she had an overwhelming sensation that "some mother's boy must be rescued that night or not at all" (Ruffin, 104). She then pleaded with the audience for that young man to come forward, which he did. That night, alone in her darkened room, Fanny recorded on paper the pleadings of her Lord's heart:

Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,

Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave.

Weep o'er the erring one, lift up the fallen,

Tell them of Jesus the mighty to save.

Rescue the perishing, care for the dying;

Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save.

The Father of mercies sent the Son to rescue a perishing world. This is what Calvary is all about and this is the Savior's ordained mission for every true believer, without exception. In the last chapter we examined the destiny of the damned--the reality that every unsaved person is going to a literal hell. Now we must analyze how revival works into the divine scheme of reaching a fallen world.

The King of Creation designed the church to be a community of faith that is an instrument of the Holy Spirit to rescue the perishing. Whenever Christians possess God's heart they aggressively reach the unsaved. When we fall into lukewarmness our hearts are hardened to the temporal and eternal agonies of those without Christ. Ezekiel prophesied, "My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them" (Ezk. 34:6). Tragically, most American Christians are not searching for the lost sheep Jesus died to save either. We have more than enough Bible knowledge to accomplish the task. In the end, failing to reach the lost is a heart problem, not a knowledge issue. Our self-absorbing love of pleasure and sin drains us of our compassion for the lost.

The Lord desires His church to resemble those who came out of the upper room on the day of Pentecost--filled with the Spirit's power to turn the world upside down. The lost desperately need us to be full of faith and full of the Holy Ghost or we will not have the power and authority to set them free. They need us to be Christ's hands to touch them, His feet to run after them, and His voice to call them home. George Macleod pleaded that ". . . the cross be raised again at the center of the marketplace as well as on the steeple of the church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves; on the town garbage heap; at the crossroad so cosmopolitan that they had to write his title in Hebrew and in Latin and in Greek . . . at the kind of place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble. Because that is where he died. And that is what he died about. And that is where churchmen ought to be, and what churchmen should be about" (Dixon, 168).

It is time we become modern day John the Baptists crying in the wildernesses of our neighborhoods, schools and cities. To compassionately warn the ungodly, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Mt. 3:2) and plead with the careless, "Prepare to meet thy God" (Amos 4:12). Before we will allow our lives to be disturbed with the suffering and sin of others, it is essential that we know God's heart for humanity and allow it to change our lives.

THE HEART OF GOD

God's heart for the human race is perfectly seen in the face of Jesus Christ. The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah is a prophetic picture of the purpose of Christ's sacrificial death. This oracle was announced seven hundred and fifty years before the actual event took place. The fifth verse unmistakably reveals the crucified Savior's mission. "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). This section of Scripture explains why the Father sent His Son. A brief study of this verse will assist us in beginning to understand His heart.

Jesus was "pierced for our transgressions." The Hebrew word for transgression is peshah, which can also be translated as rebellion. Every sin constitutes a deliberate act of rebellion against God because all sin is the breaking of His laws. Our rebellion is so deeply rooted in our character that it is impossible to free

ourselves from its evil control. The Messiah was pierced with nails, thorns and spear so we could be forgiven and find victory over our rebellious nature.

Jesus was "crushed for our iniquities." We are easily overwhelmed with the guilty burden of our transgressions and crumble under the regrets that weigh down our hearts. Jesus did not abandon humanity. The Lamb of God took upon himself the crushing weight of our crimes against heaven so we could be emancipated from the slavery of sin. Rebels will never experience freedom from sin until they know the joy of godly repentance.

Jesus bore the "punishment that brought us peace." Humanity is a rebel race convinced that their rebellion is normal. Unrepentant sinners are waging a real war against Almighty God. They fight against His kingdom and willfully break His laws. Every non-Christian defiantly refuses to bow his knee to the King of kings in spite of the consequences of such an act of high treason. The Scriptures teach that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). There is no such thing as balancing the scales of life by doing more good deeds than bad. Nor is there a possibility of compromise between God and rebels. Jesus took upon Himself the punishment we justly deserve so peace could be made between God and man. The war ends when rebels fall at the feet of the Saviour and plead for mercy.

By Christ's "wounds we are healed." Though sin may produce fleeting moments of pleasure, in the end it ALWAYS inflicts sorrow; sorrow in this life and sorrow in the next. Sin inflicts sorrow on us, our loved ones and even upon strangers. Earth is a planet of pain, a weeping world full of sorrow, suffering under the wages of our sinful labors. The Father saw the sorrow sin heaped upon fallen man and was filled with perfect pity. So He sent His Son to rescue all who would turn from their self-destructive ways by abandoning themselves to Him. He who knew no sin was beaten, bruised and crucified so we could find spiritual, emotional, physical and relational healing through Him.

The Father sent the Son to "seek and to save what was lost" (Lk. 19:10). Though He hates our sin, He loves us. The prize Jesus sought while hanging on Golgotha's tree was the heart of man. His love for us was so great that it drove Him to the cross. He purchased our deliverance with His own blood. What greater expression of love could be portrayed than the Redeemer laying down His life for a rebel race: the perfect for the imperfect, the righteous for the wicked, and the innocent for the guilty? The Lover of our soul aggressively pursued us, even when we did not want Him. This is the heart of God!

GOD'S HEART REVEALED

As the Father sent the Son into the world to save sinners, Jesus sent His disciples. How can we claim to be disciples of Christ when we do not live out the same mission that compelled Him to the cross? The apostle John taught, "Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did" (1 Jn. 2:6). This command is not an option. We must love as He loved, forgive as He forgave, seek the lost as He sought them and sacrifice our lives in like manner. Paul presented this same teaching when he commanded all believers to be imitators of Jesus (Eph.5:1). We become imitators of the Master when we know His heartbeat and touch a suffering world with His tender mercy.

Missionary Jim Elliot was martyred in Ecuador when he brought the Saviour's love to a feared tribe of cruel Indians. His life was not his own as evidenced by a prayer he composed in his diary, "God deliver me from the dread asbestos of other things. Saturate me with the oil of the Spirit that I may be aflame. . . . Father, take my life, yea, my blood if Thou wilt, and consume it with Thine enveloping fire. I would not save it, for it is not mine to save. Have it, Lord have it all. . . . Pour out my life as an oblation for the world. . . . Make me

Thy fuel, Flame of God!" (Elliot, 58-59, 240). His blood, along with four other missionaries, baptized that stony spot where they were slain. The Conquering King then claimed that land as His own.

Elizabeth Elliot continued the work her husband Jim began. She took the saving message of Jesus to the very tribe that murdered her husband. In time, even those who slaughtered the missionaries were wonderfully converted. One person ablaze with the heart of God can do more than a hundred thousand lukewarm Christians.

Revival is one of the most beautiful expressions of God's heart. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit awakens the church and reaps a tremendous harvest of souls for the kingdom. "The Christian man who studies the streets," taught William Riley, "will rightly interpret the spirit of Jesus, who, when He looked upon the multitude, was filled with compassion for them. With his Savior he will see that the poor are there, the maimed, the halt, the blind; yea, there are the wounded, the bleeding, the dying!" (Riley, 200). When we see the destiny of the damned through the eyes of Christ, we will weep as He wept and be filled with His compassion that transforms men and nations.

Jesus compelled the saints of all ages to, "open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" (Jn. 4:35). The critical need in this hour is for laborers or the plentiful crop of souls will forever be lost. All we have to do is open our eyes and see that our family, friends, and co-workers are damning themselves to hell through their rebellion. It would forever change our lives if we could gaze into the depths of hell for a minute. We would hear the cries of the damned, smell the flesh that is ever burning but never consumed, feel the unending despair of utter hopelessness and hear the hatred for God that spews from their lips. Oh, how it would utterly change us.

One day while traveling on a train, Jesus revealed His heart to General William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army. In a vision he saw a raging sea. Above it loomed blackened storm clouds that sent forth lightning and peals of thunder. A massive rock arose out of the sea, breaking through the stormy sky, piercing the heavens. Around the base of the great rock a platform was built where people walked around enjoying themselves.

As Booth peered deeper into the sea, he saw the faces of men and women screaming in hopeless agony as they were drowning with no one to rescue them. One after another would sink down, never to rise again. The raging ocean was the sea of humanity in rebellion against God. The lightning and thunder were divine warnings of the eternal judgment awaiting those who reject their Maker. Christ was the rock that came out of the sea of humanity, spanning heaven and earth. The platform built upon the rock was the church. The majority of those on the platform carelessly strolled about in their selfish pursuits, unconcerned that multitudes of immortal souls were drowning in their sin. They were far too busy with the cares of this life to be concerned about the perishing. Only a few saints selflessly surrendered themselves to the Savior's service to reach the lost. This was a picture of the church in Booth's day and now in our own.

The Lord shared with Booth His heart and thoughts (Pr. 1:23). He became a man consumed with reaching people who were dying in their sin. During the early days of Salvation Army, his converts aggressively sought to bring non-Christians to the foot of the cross. They saw men, women and children radically saved, and in this way the Army flourished. Many of these radicals founded outposts around the world because they were thoroughly devoted to the Saviour's mission. What a phenomenal privilege is offered to Christians that they could live and die in the service of their Redeemer. This kind of dedication is not

extreme. It is the expected lifestyle of every true disciple.

REVIVAL AND REFORMATION

Genuine revival always incorporates reformation. Reformation is the restoration of Biblical truths and practices that were forsaken through neglect or false teaching. "I believe that the imperative need of the day is not simply revival," touted Tozer, "but the radical reformation that will go to the root of our moral and spiritual maladies and deal with the causes rather than with consequences, with the disease rather than with symptoms" (Tozer, Keys, 12). Such is the case with the doctrine of heaven and hell and the command to reach the unsaved.

The evangelical church in the west, including Pentecostals and Charismatics, may doctrinally believe in a literal heaven and hell, but applicationally live as though these doctrines were fairy tales. In practice, most Christians prove by their lifestyles that they do not care about those who are dying without Christ. Their assertions about wanting to see the lost saved are only worthless boasts to ease their consciences because their lifestyles do not line up with their claims.

Leonard Ravenhill related a story that revealed the conflict between our lifestyles and doctrine. "Charlie Peace was a criminal. Laws of God or man curbed him not. Finally the law caught up with him, and he was condemned to death. On the fatal morning in Armley Jail, Leeds, England, he was taken on the death-walk. Before him went the prison chaplain, routinely and sleepily reading some Bible verses. The criminal touched the preacher and asked what he was reading. 'The Consolations of Religion,' was the reply. Charlie Peace was shocked at the way he professionally read about hell. Could a man be so unmoved under the very shadow of the scaffold as to lead a fellow-human there and yet, dry-eyed, read of a pit that has no bottom into which this fellow must fall? Could this preacher believe the words that there is an eternal fire that never consumes its victims, and yet slide over the phrase without a tremor? Is a man human at all who can say with no tears, 'You will be eternally dying and yet never know the relief that death brings'? All this was too much for Charlie so he preached.

"'Sir' addressing the preacher, 'if I believed what you and the church of God say that you believe, even if England were covered with broken glass from coast to coast, I would walk over it, if need be, on hands and knees and think it worth while living, just to save one soul from an eternal hell like that'" (Ravenhill, Why, 34). An applicational belief in hell would compel Christians to change their lifestyles in whatever manner necessary to fulfill the privileged responsibility of being Christ's ambassadors to the world.

The church is shrinking in America and Western Europe. She has lost her voice to speak to secular society. Our compromise has caused the unsaved to think that the church is irrelevant in our post-modern world. If we do not wake up to this terrifying situation, we may soon be like many Western European nations where less than one percent of the population is born again. A modern dark age has fallen over much of Europe as the people reject Biblical Christianity for the pantheon of secular and sensual gods. And we are quickly becoming like them. We need a modern reformation to bring us back to New Testament Christianity in word, practice and power.

Many churches that have claimed to be in revival never obtained the genuine because they did not experience a reformation. Since their theology and lifestyles were not greatly altered from what it was before the alleged event took place, they never bore the proof of legitimate revival i.e., the transformation of society. Their Christianity did not line up with the Scriptural and historical model of a revived church that turns the world upside down. A move of God may have begun in the church but never became an

authentic revival because reformation never took place. Tozer had something to add to this point. "It is my considered opinion that under the present circumstances we do not want revival at all. A widespread revival of the kind of Christianity we know today in America might prove to be a moral tragedy from which we would not recover in a hundred years" (Tozer, Keys, 12). What a terrifying indictment.

Revival and reformation changes the very belief, character and heart of people, who in turn become agents of change in their church, community and nation. We must be careful not to propagate as revival that which is nothing more than another version of self-centered religion or maybe something worse. The Prince of Peace wants us to know His heart and be renewed by the power of His Word. Then a revived church can take the reformation into the highways and hedges of our fallen world.

EVERY SAINT'S RESPONSIBILITY

Jesus commanded every Christian to "go and make disciples" (Mt. 28:19). We are called to reach the unsaved and instruct new converts in how to live as aliens and radicals in this world. Before we can repent of not rescuing the perishing we must first come to grips with the reality that it is sin. Our pride and fear of man has kept us from witnessing about the Lover of our souls. Our love of pleasure has driven us to avoid the inconveniences of touching the eternal and temporal needs of a hurting world. J. H. Jowett challenged the church, "Does the cry of the world's need pierce the heart and ring even through the fabric of our dreams? I can take my newspaper, which is oftentimes a veritable cupful of horrors, and I can pursue it at the breakfast table, and it does not add a single tang to my feast. I wonder if one who is as unmoved can ever be a servant of the suffering Lord!" (Jowett, 35). True compassion and obedience is far more than talk.

Every believer is called to be "Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (2 Cor. 5:20). What an astounding privilege that the Almighty would make His appeal to the lost through us. There is more to this than quoting Bible verses to unsaved people. It is presenting to them through the power of the Holy Ghost the very heart of God--that the Father sent the Son to save sinners. When we are moved by the heart of the Good Shepherd we will joyfully become His ambassadors--His hands, feet and voice to bring men, women and children into His eternal fold.

Some may honestly confess, "We know we should be touching the lost but the will and desire are not there." Obedience is not contingent upon emotion. None-the-less, through a believer's honest confession God begins His reconstructing work. Whenever we comprehend the deficiencies in our characters and spiritual life we can begin to cry out for the Spirit's transforming power. We cannot change ourselves and the Lord never asked us to. The Spirit has promised to be our Helper and Sanctifier if we wholeheartedly plead for His help and cooperate in the process. "When Christian people are wholly yielded to God the result inevitably seems to be that God gives them a passion to win lost men and women to Christ" (Paul Smith, 51).

The Lord offers soul winners a joy unknown to anyone else. It is the joy of redeeming a soul from the eternal torments of hell, of changing eternity, of seeing families restored, and of depopulating the kingdom of hell. What a joy it will be to lay at Jesus' feet the souls of the men, women and children we won to Him while on earth. During the 1904 Welsh Revival, "A man made his way slowly along the densely filled aisle, towards the pulpit pew. When he was recognized there was a thrill of joy not quite free from fear. They knew him as one of the notorious characters of the whole district, a pugilist (fighter) of no light form, and leader of a gang of thirteen.

"They saw his face, stained with perspiration and tears, and, at first glance, more terrifying than usual; but there was a gleam of new life upon it. 'None of you will ever know,' he began, in a voice part shout, part sob, 'what I have passed through tonight. I have wept a pool of tears where I have been sitting and they were the gladdest tears I ever knew. The agony before that! My head seemed to swell and swell, as if it would at last burst. But it grew easier when the tears came. You all know me: you know for whom I have fought; but I am changing sides to-night, to fight on the side of Jesus'" (Roberts, Glory, 74). He did indeed change sides. His evangelistic work began with his old gang of thirteen! He won them all to Christ.

This is the goal of our labors, the radical conversion of vast numbers of rebels and the total reconstruction of their lives and families. This is where men change sides, forsaking the kingdom of hell to swear loyalty to Christ, to surrender themselves to the Lord with greater abandon than they did to the devil and the lusts of the flesh. This is the fruit of revival. This is New Testament Christianity!

FROM THE TOP DOWN

The prophet Amos rebuked the people of God because they strove to fill themselves with the comforts of life while never grieving "over the ruin of Joseph" (Amos 6:6). The unrestrained rebellion of our people is destroying the very fabric of our nation. Most Christians are not greatly disturbed by this until it affects their pocketbooks. The pestilence of sexual sins sweeps our nation and church as well. The media in all of its various forms are teaching both children and adults a relativistic morality. Our schools are breeding grounds for liberal agendas that are devastating our children and our children's children. Higher education has rejected the Judeo/Christian worldview and freely propagates their anti-Christian philosophies to young influential minds. All the while the church does not grieve over the ruin of our land.

Church leaders lead by example. When the shepherds do not grieve over the ruin of their cities then their congregations will not either. If the pastors fail to be soul winners, then their parishioners follow suit. Whether it is fruitfulness or barrenness, the church will reflect the spiritual condition of the pastor and leadership. This is the Biblical model, that spiritual life or death comes from the top down. Jesus demonstrated this throughout His ministry. For the Gospel to spread around the world the Savior would have to reproduce His heart and zeal in the disciples or the church would flounder and cease to exist.

Whatever Jesus wanted His disciples to do, He first lived by example. The Messiah sent the disciples out to preach the Good News, pray for the sick and cast out devils only after He showed them how. The Master did not expect His followers to live a crucified life until He first demonstrated it. Jesus was a living example, not a teacher without action. Here is an area in which we need a radical reformation. In our day, we are more prone to find a pastor hiding in his office behind a computer or out on the golf course than reaching his community. A lie has been propagated that the people win the lost while the preacher cheers them on. This is totally contrary to the discipleship method of Jesus. Not just that, a host of earthshaking saints throughout the Bible and history have proved that Christian leaders **MUST** lead by example. Then, both pastors and parishioners will see their spiritual barrenness healed as they together reach their unsaved neighbors and communities.

Jesus wanted the zeal that consumed Him to consume the disciples, so He lived as a radical with a fire burning in His bones. "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" (Lk. 12:49). The fire that burned in Jesus was contagious and the disciples caught it. A lack of spiritual fire in the congregation is directly linked to the absence of fire in the preacher. If the pastor does not have the fire of God how will the congregation ever know what it looks like? Before revival can come, preachers and

churches must have a passion for the lost, for that is what revival is all about. How will congregations sacrifice their lives, time and money to reach a hurting world if the leadership does not first demonstrate it? Revival predominately begins with the pastors.

Pastor, it is not enough to teach the flock how to witness if you are not a living example. Do not make the excuse that your community has greater spiritual strongholds than other ones. There is not a demonic force on earth that can stand against the power of the Holy Spirit. And dear pastor, don't claim that evangelism is not your calling because that is precisely what the pastoral ministry is all about--seeking the lost and discipling the saved. Remember, Jesus is the Good Shepard who exemplified the pastoral ministry.

The shepherds of this nation need to know God's heart and to become living epistles of His heart to their congregations and communities. Then both pastors and parishioners will share the joy the Savior uniquely gives to soul-winners. Emma Booth-Tucker understood this when she penned, "The portions of my life which have given me the most satisfaction are the seasons when I carried the cross for Jesus, and the one regret which fastens down upon my spirit at the thought of turning from earth and entering heaven is the realization that I shall never again be able to companion Jesus by bearing the cross, by suffering with Him for the salvation of sinners, and by ministering to Him by ministering to the sorrowing, suffering multitudes for whom His blood was given" (McPherson, 73). What a profound blessing it is to share in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings over those rushing to damnation (Phil. 3:10).

Every Christian, but especially the spiritual leaders of this nation, desperately needs their hearts filled with compassion for non-believers. Richard Baxter pleaded with the saints, "Go to poor sinners with tears in your eyes, that they may see you believe them to be miserable, and that you unfeignedly pity their case. Deal with them with earnest, humble entreaties. Let them perceive it is the desire of your heart to do them good; that you have no other end but their everlasting happiness; and that it is your sense of their danger, and your love to their souls, that forces you to speak; even because you 'know the terrors of the Lord,' and for fear you should see them in eternal torments" (Baxter, 121-122).

When the eyes of the pastors are dry, their congregation's will be likewise. Since pastors and parishioners are not soaking their altars with tears for the lost they do not see them saved. If Christians do not care about the destiny of the damned who will? To our eternal shame we no longer grieve over the ruin of our people. The watchmen on the walls have fallen asleep, the enemy has broken down the defenses of our cities, schools and homes--he has taken the nation captive. What are we going to do about it?

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