

The Work of Preparing

by Glenn Meldrum

The sermon emphasizes the importance of preparing for revival by filling in the valleys of our lives, bringing down the mountains of pride, making the crooked ways straight, and making the rough ways smooth.

Scripture: Jeremiah 12:5

Topics: "Revival Preparation", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Glenn Meldrum preaches about the obtainability of revival, emphasizing the need to fill every valley in our lives by facing difficulties and overcoming them through God's grace. He discusses the valley of extreme individualism in American culture, highlighting how self-idolatry and self-indulgence hinder spiritual growth. Meldrum also addresses the importance of bringing down every mountain of pride and unbelief, stressing the need for personal responsibility in preparing for revival. He urges believers to make the crooked ways straight by aligning their lives with God's Word and to make the rough ways smooth by pursuing intimacy with God. Ultimately, the goal is for the Lord's glory to be revealed through genuine revival, where Christians must prioritize giving God the glory and preparing for His return.

Transcript

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).

Revival is obtainable! It is not like the proverbial carrot dangling before the helpless horse that never gains the prize. The preparation for revival consists of practical Biblical truths that are spiritually profitable for all who follow that way. In this chapter we will continue our examination of Luke 3:4-6 (Isa. 40:3-5) and see how this prophesy further relates to revival.

1. FILL EVERY VALLEY

In Biblical times, valleys were sites of great wars. Allegorically, they represent the difficult and painful seasons of life where we battle the enemies that come from outside us and within us. In preparing for the King of kings to visit His people, we must fill in the valleys of our lives. This means we must face the difficulties of life and overcome them through His grace.

The prophet Jeremiah had grown weary over the prosperity of the wicked. After he vocalized his complaint to God, the Lord responded with a challenge, "If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan?" (Jer. 12:5). Lord was challenging the prophet to stand up and act like a man in the midst of strenuous times. If we cannot overcome sin, depression and fear in times of ease and prosperity, how will we ever stand in the heated battles over the souls of perishing humanity where the conflicts are fiercest?

The Valley Of Individualism

Extreme individualism is one metaphorical valley of American life that causes us much sorrow. This philosophical belief is as old as the fall of mankind. It became the driving force of the 14th century Italian Renaissance and now has its expression in modern day humanism. The Greek philosopher Protagoras of the 5th century B.C. gave us the definition of humanism, "Man is the measure of all things." Extreme individualism is the philosophical underpinning of our entire American culture. It is a thread sewn throughout the fabric of our society. Individualism is a major breeding ground for depression, fear and a host of other sins.

Extreme individualism places man at the center of life rather than God. This is self-idolatry. Self-idolatry is the spiritual condition where the desires and ambitions of the individual become all-important and all-consuming. This hedonistic philosophy makes the pursuit of pleasure the primary purpose of man. The individualist proclaims, "I want what I desire no matter what it costs because it's my right to have whatever makes me happy." The goal of human existence then revolves around the fulfillment of one's own happiness at any cost. Extreme individualism produces self-indulgent individuals who, in turn, create a self-indulgent society.

Some of the most powerful propaganda machines for advancing individualism and a self-indulgent society come out of our public schools and the television, movie and music industries. Millions of people are manipulated through these avenues by redefining what is spiritual, moral and immoral. They define for the American public what constitutes god, faith, success, love, family and personal worth. These propaganda machines are more involved in raising children than parents are. Strangers who define God, morality and purpose from a secular worldview shape a child's mind and conscience. The majority of Christians unknowingly incorporates this philosophy into their homes and then wonders why their children turn from Christ when they reach their teens.

Personal happiness becomes the all-consuming goal of self-indulgent people. Driven by their lusts they seek whatever they dream will make them happy or dispose of whatever does not. They search for that elusive possession, position, or person to satisfy their unfulfilled desires. Advertisers study the cravings of people and then manipulate them through their own obsessions. They announce, "You deserve a new Ford today" because they know you already believe it. The lust for more "stuff" (from our "Stuff Marts") has produced an economic system based on credit that has run amuck. Americans are no longer masters of their own desires but slaves to their evil passions--and this includes most Christians.

The offspring of extreme individualism and self-indulgence is a victim mentality. If the purpose of life is nothing more than personal happiness than whatever robs us of our happiness we judge as bad. People consider themselves victims when they believe they have been robbed of their happiness. The vicious cycle begins of blaming others for our own sins and character flaws. Children blame their parents for their

mistakes, alcoholics their family and homosexuals their genes. Where else but in America can a woman spill a cup of coffee in her lap while driving a car and sue MacDonald's for six million dollars? We are a people who refuse to accept responsibility for our own actions and sins. When selfishness rules an individual's life, it does not matter how many people are hurt in his or her pursuit of happiness.

The futility of life apart from Christ will be a constant companion no matter how wealthy, famous or influential a person becomes. In our relentless search for significance, each of us craves a reason-for-being that gives value to life and death. After analyzing the American culture Ravi Zacharias stated, "I am absolutely convinced that meaninglessness does not come from being weary of pain. Meaninglessness comes from being weary of pleasure. And that's why we are bankrupt of meaning in a land of so much" (Zacharias). When the gods we serve are nothing more than the lusts our own flesh we are bound to come to a crisis of existence. The very things that defined our highly praised "freedom" have actually become the "tyranny of our own desires" (Hauerwas, 33).

Jesus Is All We Need

The same humanistic philosophy that manipulates the world has possessed the church. Why should pagans come to Christ when they see little difference between themselves and so called believers? It could even be argued that a very large number of Christians have become as pleasure driven as any proclaimed hedonist. This very issue provoked the infamous French atheist Voltaire to pronounce, "When it comes to money, all men are of the same religion" (MacDonald, 89).

To fill up the valleys of our lives we must first recognize the thoughts and passions that rob us of God's glory. We must then strategically dismantle them according to the Scriptures and through the power of the Holy Spirit. The very fact that Christians suffer under depression, fear and anxiety is proof that they do not believe Jesus is all they need. In essence, they are saying that Jesus is not enough, that He cannot satisfy their deepest needs, and that He is not able to give joy through all of life's challenges. We must reclaim the truth that people, possessions and wealth cannot gratify our profoundest needs. All the philosophies of men are only as strong as the frail, finite minds that created them. There must be a radical change in our lifestyles or we will continue along the same paths we have traveled for years, even decades.

It is time we fill in the valleys of our lives with something that truly satisfies. Only Jesus can satisfy the deepest longing of our souls, heal the rawest wounds of our heart and calm the raging storms of our minds. He will not force Himself into our lives. We must make our lives living temples where the Holy Spirit will freely dwell.

2. BRING DOWN EVERY MOUNTAIN

The Word of God refers to mountains in both positive and negative terms. Isaiah's prophecy portrays them negatively as mountains of pride and places where men worship false gods. These mountains must be torn down before revival can come.

Pride hinders revival just as it stops an individual from surrendering to Christ. Arrogance impedes holiness and is a barrier to intimate prayer. Conceit breeds contention. Our over inflated egos reap havoc on families and churches (Pr. 13:10). The fear of man is another name for pride: fear of what others think, fear of not measuring up to expectations and fear of sharing the faith.

Jehoshaphat was one of the few godly kings Judah had. One day the armies of Moab and Ammon gathered their forces to fight against Judah. The king resolved "to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah" (2 Chr. 20:3). He humbly prayed before a great audience, "O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you" (2 Chr. 20:2). God gave the king a miraculous victory, not because he had a mighty army, but because he recognized his human weakness and the Lord's awesome power.

Pride compels people to trust in their own ability, strength and wisdom rather than the Lord. It keeps pastors from the place of prayer as they run after the latest church growth guru. Self-important leaders focus on natural abilities rather than a miracle working God. The mountains of pride need to be pulled down in all of their various forms before revival can come! We overcome the sin of pride by humbling ourselves before the Savior. This process begins by comprehending our pride then repenting of it. This sin is so deeply interwoven into our character that apart from the Spirit's illuminating influence it is exceedingly difficult to perceive. As with Jehoshaphat, the Lord will pour out His power through those whose eyes are fixed on Him, not through the self-reliant.

Mountains Of Unbelief And Irresponsibility

Patrick Fairbairn believed that there are two major hindrances to revival that we need to confront. He said that most Christians have a difficulty with "faith in the possibility of the work, and a sense of personal responsibility in regard to its production" (Roberts, Revival, 126). These hindrances reside in our misconceptions about God and the purpose of man. The sin of unbelief is a byproduct of our distorted views about the Creator and His redemptive work in history. We would not be a doubting people if we truly knew Him and recognized what He is able and willing to do. We will never spiritually rise higher than our understanding of the Lord and the faith we place in Him. Great faith in a great God is able to accomplish great things. Not because the people who believe are special, but because the Almighty God they trust in is all-powerful and good.

Unbelief hinders revival because we doubt the Savior's desire and ability to transform our churches and nation. Unbelief can even dominate our prayers for revival. Nevertheless, spiritual awakenings come through faith. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him" (Mk. 11:23). The prayer of faith can tear down the natural and supernatural strongholds that keep revival at bay.

The second hindrance Fairbairn pointed out related to our unwillingness to accept personal responsibility for revival coming to the local church, and in a broader sense, to the nation. James told us "faith without deeds is useless" (Jam. 2:20). This means that a desire for revival without action is worthless. We need to accept personal responsibility for the fulfillment of revival through prayer and evangelism. To tear down the mountain of irresponsibility each believer must accept personal responsibility in preparing for the Lord of Glory to visit His people.

Seeking God to send revival is the duty of every Christian. Yet there is a special obligation laid upon pastors and spiritual leaders to prepare for its coming. There is a profound truth that we cannot escape--as goes the leaders, so goes the church. Dead churches are the result of dead preachers, dead deacons and dead teachers. Thomas Trask stated, "Passionless pastors make for passionless pulpits that result in passionless people and empty altars" (Trask, 1).

Pastor, if your church is spiritually dead, then you must begin by looking at yourself. Stop blaming the congregation. If they do not have the fire of God, maybe it is because you do not have the fire to impart to them. They do not need another program or some tame Sunday morning service; they need an encounter with the Living God. "The preacher, by direct, divine appointment, is God's chosen servant to promote revival in his own church and community. . . . In a word, revival is the minister's main work. The church has never risen spiritually above the ministry" (Wadsworth, 81-82).

3. MAKE THE CROOKED WAYS STRAIGHT

To aid us in understanding what the Scriptures mean by "crooked ways" we should examine the English root word for "crooked," which is "crook." What is a crook? A crook is a person who lives by dishonest methods. "Crooked ways" are the unlawful, perverse and fraudulent ways we live (Strong's number 4646). Our compromise with the world and "little" sins are crooked ways. They are the unlawful areas of our lives that we do not think are big issues, but God does. Our fraudulent conduct may seem innocent by the world's standards, yet it robs us of relationship with Jesus.

These crooked ways that abound in church folk hinder revival. Sin takes root in our lives when we neglect or reject the teachings of the Scriptures. Every dimension of our lives is to conform to the Word. We must never manipulate the Bible to fit our crooked lifestyles. The Word effectively communicates to us what is pleasing and displeasing to God, so we are left without excuse.

Charles Sheldon's challenging phrase, "What would Jesus do?" is still pertinent today. Would Jesus spend money the way you do on what you do? Would He watch TV shows and movies saturated with sexual innuendos, violence, vulgarities and anti-Christian philosophies? Would He listen to secular music filled with sex, drugs, and worldly values? The crooked ways destroys marriages and ruins children. By the Spirit of God King David commanded, "You who love the LORD, hate evil!" (Ps. 97:10a, NKJV). How can Christians embrace entertainment and lifestyle choices that are the very things that crucified Jesus? Consider Paul's uncompromised teaching:

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a man is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God (Eph. 5:1-5).

The key to getting the crooked ways out of our lives, families and churches comes from a hungry heart after God. Jesus told us, "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (Jn. 14:15). Moreover, to those who love Him, "his commandments are not burdensome" (1 Jn. 5:3).

4. MAKE THE ROUGH WAYS SMOOTH

Have you ever driven over a highway that felt like a washboard? Your car goes bumpity-bumpity mile after mile. Now imagine someone driving a horse and buggy down that road. He would think it was fairly smooth. Get that buggy going 70 mph and he would have a different opinion. Christians who are not pressing into God will never notice the roughness of the road since they are not spiritually going anywhere. For instance, people consumed with the accumulation of wealth or the pursuit of pleasure may never know how much they grieve God's heart or sense the warning signs of a troubled marriage.

Those who are aggressively pursuing the Lord will feel the roughness of the road the faster they go. Christians striving to walk near to Christ will even want the questionable things out of their lives. They become sensitive to the Holy Spirit and know whenever the slightest thing comes between them and God. Charles Finney was such a man. He stated, "I found I could not live without enjoying the presence of God, and if at any time a cloud came over me, I could not rest, I could not study, I could not attend to anything with the least satisfaction or benefit until the way was again cleared between my soul and God" (Finney, Autobiography, 38-39).

The man, woman, church or denomination that is hungry after God will remove anything and everything that may separate them from the Lover of their souls. Finney revealed passion for Jesus when he declared, "I had no desire to make money. I had no hungering and thirsting after worldly pleasures and amusements in any direction. My whole mind was taken up with Jesus and his salvation, and the world seemed to me of very little consequences. Nothing, it seemed to me, could compete with the worth of souls, and no labor, I thought, could be so sweet and no employment so exalted as that of holding up Christ to a dying world" (Finney, Autobiography, 28). As Jesus said, such wisdom is "proved right by all her children" (Lk. 7:35).

5. SO THE LORD WILL BE REVEALED

The ultimate reason for revival is so the "glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it" (Isa. 40:5). All of our experiences, traditions, doctrines and methods must bow to the lordship of Jesus. Anything that robs Christ of His glory we are obligated to tear down and cast aside. Everything that advances His glory and kingdom is our responsibility press forward. Whatever is contrary to His will hinders revival, while everything that comes out of His good and perfect will advances His kingdom and the cause of spiritual awakenings. Let us not rob God of His glory by hindering or resisting the outpouring of the Spirit.

In 1965, the Indonesian island of Timor experienced revival. Unfortunately, they also experienced strong resistance from within the church. "The movement could have morally and spiritually transformed all of Timor, had all of the churches responded to the opportunities and the challenge of the moment. . . . However, most of the churches, enslaved by an ecclesiastical system failed. The churches thus lost an opportunity that may turn into a judgment upon it" (Peters, 34). Two hundred thousand were added to the church because of this revival. Imagine the millions that could have been saved if the entire church had embraced this move of the Spirit.

Many have shut down a genuine revival because it upset their lives or did not fit into the theological framework. Frank Bartleman gave an account of some deacons who kicked God out of their church in Los Angeles during the Azusa Street Revival of 1906: "I went to Smale's church one night, and he had resigned. The meetings had run daily in the First Baptist Church for fifteen weeks. . . . The officials of the church were tired of the innovation and wanted to return to the old order. He was told to either stop the revival or get out. He wisely chose the latter. But what an awful position for the church to take--to throw God out. In this same way they drove the Spirit of God out of the churches in Wales. They tired of His presence, desiring to return to the old, cold, ecclesiastical order. . . . Selfish spirits can never understand sacrifice" (Bartleman, 35, 37). What a terrifying situation the church leaders placed themselves in--to fight against the Lord of Hosts.

Revival is withheld from the land when Christians exalt experience, personalities, fame, wealth, denominationalism, or doctrine above the glorification of God. He will not share His glory with another! The great I Am will rend the heavens so mere mortals may gaze upon His magnificence and so salvation may flow like a river through our cities.

History reveals many men and women who learned to give the glory to God and became the benefactors of His presence as a result. One such man was David Morgan, who was involved in the 1859 Welsh Revival. After a powerful meeting on New Years Day at Devil's Bridge, the minister and Mr. Morgan quietly walked to their lodging. Toward the end of their journey, the minister broke the holy silence saying, "Didn't we have a blessed meeting, Mr. Morgan?" Mr. Morgan replied, "Yes!" Then after a pause, added, "The Lord would give us great things, if He could only trust us." The minister questioned, "What do you mean?" Morgan wisely answered, "If He could trust us not to steal the glory for ourselves." Then he proclaimed at the top of his voice, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory" (Evans, 69-70).

Our land is in need of such men and women today. When God's people can be trusted with His glory, He will freely give it. But not before.

6. THE MOUTH OF THE LORD HAS SPOKEN

Isaiah's prophecy came from the mouth of the Lord and has a threefold fulfillment. First of all, John the Baptist was the direct fulfillment of this prophecy. He lived out the principles involved in Isaiah's oracle and saw the fruit of his labor when the Messiah was revealed. John literally prepared the way for Jesus to visit Israel.

Secondly, we can exercise this same principle of preparing the way of the Lord today. Whenever saints perform the words of this prophecy, the Lord will visit His people. Our present hope should be for a national awakening that sweeps America and even the entire world. The people of God must diligently prepare the way for His visitation. His Word is absolute truth and His promises never fail. The Lord is not the obstacle to revival, we are!

Finally, Jesus based His second coming upon the fact of His death, resurrection and ascension into heaven. While over 500 people saw Jesus ascend into heaven, two angels spoke to the multitude and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). We will see the culmination of history when the church throughout the world has prepared the way of the Lord. Jesus is coming back and we must prepare the way for His soon return.

John prepared the way for Christ and saw Him come. Church history contains wonderful accounts of the Lord revealing Himself in the beauty of holiness whenever the saints prepared the way. The Holy Spirit is the same today as He was when the church received her first Pentecostal outpouring and saw her first revival. He will do it again when Christians rightly prepare. When the fires of revival sweep our nation and world we are also preparing for Christ's second coming.

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