

Revival Series - Lecture #1

by Leonard Ravenhill

Leonard Ravenhill's sermon emphasizes the necessity of personal brokenness and prayer for genuine revival in the church and society.

Scripture: Psalm 80:3-85, Hosea 10:12, Joel 1:13, Joel 2:12, Malachi 3:2, Matthew 3:16, Acts 3:19

Topics: "Revival", "Spiritual Restoration"

Description

Leonard Ravenhill emphasizes the urgent need for revival, defining it as a process of recovery and restoration of spiritual vitality. He explains that fallow ground represents the unproductive state of believers who have lost their fervor for God, urging individuals to break up this ground through prayer and repentance. Ravenhill contrasts revival with organized evangelism, asserting that true revival is a sovereign act of God that cannot be manufactured or predicted. He calls for a deep vision of God's sorrow over sin and the necessity of personal brokenness to prepare for revival. Ultimately, he stresses that God desires to fill empty hearts rather than just church pews, highlighting the critical state of the church in a broken world.

Transcript

Revival.....another definition would be to recover, repair or restore.

Hosea 10:12 says: "Sow to yourself in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek the Lord till He come and reign righteousness upon you."

What is fallow ground?

Fallow ground is ground that has been fruitful, and then it has been plowed over, and no seed has been sown in it, and therefore it has become unproductive.

Notice, there is a human emphasis here -- it says

that we are to break up -- you break up your fallow ground.

Now take another aspect of it here in Psalm 85:6 "Would Thou not revive us again: that Thy people may rejoice in Thee." So, there is an absence of joy, of vitality -- there is an absence of ecstasy.

The very word "revive" presupposes life. You can only revive what has already had vitality -- life that has become sick, weak, or apathetic. I think the nearest analogy I can give you is a recent case of a man who apparently drowned. He had been under the water for an incredible amount of time. Then somebody pulled him out and worked and worked on him, and eventually life came again. This is actually what it means to revive,

It means to revitalize.

It means to restore lost power.

It means to recover lost energy.

In the Acts of the Apostles 3:19 we read, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." Whatever else we say about revival we have to recognize this, that revival is an act of mercy in the sovereignty of God.

There is a vast difference between revival and evangelism. When we speak of revival in America we think of church advertising, "Our revival will begin next Sunday night at a certain time and it is going to finish the next Sunday night at a certain time." Obviously this is something purely mechanical, it is something which men have engineered.

I think that one of the offenses of revival, in the historic sense, is that it cannot be organized. As Doctor Tozer said, "When revival comes it changes the moral climate of a community."

You can have revival that covers a church -- Spurgeon had that.

You can have a revival that covers a city.

You can have a revival that covers the whole nation -- and I am thinking in this context more than in the other contexts (though sometimes revival spreads from here to there -- like fire spreads.)

Revival cannot be organized -- evangelism can be organized.

Revival cannot be subsidized -- evangelism can and usually it must be.

Revival cannot be advertised -- evangelism can.

It may cost millions of dollars, as it often does, to have one of our huge,

modern, so called revivals. You have to pay vast sums of money

for time on TV, for example -- perhaps a million dollars a night.

That's incredible, that's unthinkable to me in

the context of Biblical revival, or even historical revival.

Why doesn't revival need to be advertised? For the simple reason, that fire is the most self advertising thing that there is, whether it is a physical fire or a revival fire. It draws people like a magnet.

To bring this down to modern technology -- revival cannot be computerized.

There is information that you can put in computer and presto, you get the answer predicting an outcome according to the facts that were put in. But you cannot computerize or predict revival. There are periods in which one thing predominates.

Sometimes revival is totally taken over by sorrow.

Sometimes revival is totally taken over by joy, ecstasy 'till you don't know whether you are in the flesh or whether you've gone out of the earth.

Sometimes revival is taken over by stillness.

There are times when you go to a prayer meeting and the power of God is there.

There is stillness and you feel it is creative. You feel,

"Now something is building up around here, somebody is going to come out shortly with a heart bursting... with some agonizing prayer..."

Revival cannot be rationalized. Again, one of the offensive things about revival is you can't put your finger on the spot, usually, as to how or why or where it began.

It is supremely an act of God.

You find a man would go with a series of messages to a community and before long that community is alive, it's throbbing. He goes to another town with exactly the same group of men, the same type of prayer is poured out, the same sweat and soul travail and there is no response.

You can't predict and you can't organize revival. Why? Because you can't organize where the wind is coming from. The Spirit, the wind, bloweth where it listeth. If you say it's going to come this way, it comes that way. If you say God's going to use that man, very often He doesn't even bother with that man. Revival so often comes through unknown characters.

I don't think the world has ever been in a greater sense of turmoil than it is in this moment. I don't think our nation has. Whatever we shall say about revival we have to recognize this: There are three things about natural life: conception, gestation, and birth. You can't alter the program. There has never been revival, that I can trace, that has not been preceded by agonizing prayer. You might say, "I haven't got to that stage yet of agonizing prayer. How does it come?" Well, it comes through VISION.

If we are really going to get a concept of revival we have to get a vision of God's sorrow over sin. We have to get a concept of how, day by day, we offend God. As a nation we offend God in millions of ways.

When I was praying in the Bahamas one day, I saw a great column of smoke, which happened to be coming from tires that were being burned. It was as black as could be, and over there I saw a wisp of smoke going up from the ground. I didn't think much of it until about a year after, I was praying and the Lord said, "That volume of black, thick smoke is like the volume of sin that goes up every day." All the blasphemy, all the unbelief, all the dirty stories, all the lying, all the deception, all sex-perversion, all drunkenness -- this tremendous column of iniquity goes up in the sight of God. And here you have a little wisp -- of what? That is the praise that God gets out of His people. If we are going to realize how much we

need revival we need to recognize the dimension of sin. We have to recognize that sin offends God.

Psalms 85:4 says, "Turn us, O God of our salvation and cause Thine anger towards us to cease. Wilt Thou be angry with us forever?" Psalm 80 verse 3, "Turn us again, O God, and cause Thy face to shine." Notice, it's repeated again in verse 7 and in verse 19, "...cause Thy face to shine." "...cause Thy face to shine." You know, I think one of the awesome tragedies of our day is this: the people of Israel could not live if God turned His face away from them and seems now we cannot live if God turns His face on us!

The awesomeness of God's presence... The awesomeness of God's majesty...

We've had meetings, in the last month particularly, where I would sit down at the end of the meeting. I didn't know what to do with it, and the pastor said, "Well, I can't handle a meeting like this, what do you do?" The invasion of God's power was so awesome that there was no way that you could handle it, so you just let the meeting ride itself out. We were having meetings five hours long, beginning at seven at night and finishing at midnight. College students came, and university people, and business people. When God comes, our social distinctions don't matter, our intellectual distinctions don't matter. There is an overwhelming sense that God is dealing, not with my intellect, not with my body, not with my emotions so much as with

the inner man... the inner being... the inner temple which He wants to indwell.

Isn't it amazing that with all the latola Khomeni has done, he has done some good things. He kicked liquor out of the country. Our president daren't do that. Last week he called his whole nation to five days of prayer and fasting. Do you think we have anybody in Washington who has enough insight to do that? With all the talk of spirituality they don't have enough sense to do that.

Joel speaks about the priests, the ministers of God. Look at Joel 1:13, "Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests: howl ye ministers of the altar, come lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God." Go over to verse 12 of the 2nd chapter, "Turn ye now even to Me with all your heart and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments." Come down to verse 17, "Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare Thy people, O Lord, and give not Thine heritage to reproach."

Now, how do you get to that state? There is no way you can jump to that level in ten minutes.

It is an operation.

It's a process.

It's a preparation.

There has to be an individual breaking up of fallow ground in me. What is there in my individual life that obstructs the flow of the Spirit?

If you are going to break up fallow ground you have to get your own life into a state of discipline -- and we are the most undisciplined generation of believers ever. There is no way of getting to revival unless previously there comes brokenness.

What God wants is not to fill up empty pews.

He is not concerned about filling empty churches,

He is concerned about filling empty hearts.

And empty lives, and empty eyes that have no vision;

Empty hearts that have no passion,

And empty wills that have no purpose.

Have you ever thought about the enormity of the Jewish system? A great monolith of priests and Levites, and offerings and sacrifices, and new moons and Sabbaths, and Urim and Thumin. Then suddenly God puts one solitary individual there and he has one commission. "You go and prepare the way of the Lord."

But he has all this against him:

At least 2000 priests, a senior priest and elaborate temple.

A system of buying and selling cattle and other things for sacrifice.

An outer court, where you could come to a priest and tell him of your sin and your guilt and he would make an offering for you.

And this fellow comes and he is saying that

The religious system is all obsolete

That God is going to manifest Himself independent of all of that

And that there is Somebody Else!

They say, "You must be the man." He says, "Oh, no, no, no! I am not the One. I am just coming to prepare the way of the Lord."

Now think of the sorrow of God after Adam failed.

Think of the sorrow of God after the whole system that He'd inaugurated failed.

Think of something which may be even more awesome still:

Think of the fact that 2000 years have lapsed since Jesus came and did

a full work of redemption... and the church is still dragging its feet

today!

The human dilemma that we are in right now is that we have never been in a lower point. People say sometimes, "Don't worry, we have got out of situations like this." Oh, no! We haven't. Don't you fool yourself. We've never gotten out of situation like this. You know why? Because we have never been in a situation like this. That's why!

We've never had difficulties like this. We've never had this plague of divorce. We've never had a million girls under 16 becoming pregnant, like last year. What did they say the night before last on the news, "Tonight 20,000 girls over the nation will get pregnant." Sex is a sport. Immorality is an accepted way of life.

People say there are fewer divorces than last year. Well, how do you expect any more when they don't get married? They did get married at one time and got divorced. They don't even bother to get married now, just live together. Have a baby, so what? "We agree to part," that's it. So we are a broken nation. Never, never in our history did we need revival more than today, the day in which we live.

But you don't wish revival... there is no such thing.

People say to me all over the country, "I am interested in revival." I say, "Yes, so are a million other Americans."

I find all kinds of people interested in it. I don't find many people burdened for it. People are very interested in revival, but we don't start to break the fallow ground. We don't prepare the way of the Lord.

I remember as a little boy I used to go to bed at night with a candle... you never had that joy, did you? I remember thinking how many other candles you could bring and light off that candle? I wonder and I wonder. I never found an answer, but I often used to wonder.

It was Charles Wesley who wrote the hymn,

"See how great a flame aspires, kindled by a spark of grace.

Jesus' love the nations fires, sets the kingdoms all ablaze.

To bring fire on earth He came, kindled in some hearts it is,

Oh that all might catch the blaze, all partake the glorious bliss."

Jesus said, "To bring fire on earth have I come." Did you hear anybody preach on that text? What kind of fire? Well, surely not hell fire. Holy Ghost fire!

The most devastating fire of all is not the fire that consumes a building. It isn't even the fire of hell.

The greatest, most devastating fire, is the fire of God. We say, "God is love, God is love, God is love..."

And yet our God is a consuming fire. "Who shall abide the day of His coming," Malachi says. "He is like a refiner's fire."

Mathew 3:16, "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and Fire." But you see, that aspect is not stressed in the day in which we live.

Everybody talks about the baptism. So what do you mean by the baptism? There is a baptism with the Holy Ghost and Fire. Not just with the Holy Ghost, but with Fire. When He comes He will "thoroughly purge His floor and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Which, again,

can happen individually,

or it can happen in a church,

or it can come and work through a whole community

or it can work through a whole nation.

There will be a thousand people who, if you get a heart and a vision, will say, "Oh, you've got tunnel vision." Hmm? Well, I think the one reason why the Apostle Paul conquered... and triumphed... and out-smarted us... and out-suffered us... and out-prayed us... and out-sacrificed us... and out-preached us was because he settled for one thing: "This one thing I do."

You've got to have one vision,

You've got to have one heart,

You've got to have one purpose,

"This one thing I do..." I sell out to God's will totally.

Well, what does this become? Well, I believe this thing becomes an obsession, as I was saying to a brother this morning. For fifty years I've wept, and I've prayed, and I've groaned, and I've read, and I've fasted, and I've met with guys for nights of prayer, and days of prayer, and days and days of prayer, for revival. There isn't much sign of it. Well, are you sure? You see, prayers never die.

"What are these under the altar? The prayer of saints." You never pray a prayer that is born of God without it being on record with God. God never wastes anything. Do you think you and I have prayers born of grief, born of anguish, born of desire to see an overthrow of iniquity, (for after all that is what revival is) and you think God will let them die?

Now again, the shadow of darkness and death is over this generation like nothing we've ever had before. And yet, the greatest tragedy of all is this: a sick church in a dying world. We have neither the vision nor the passion, nor at this moment, the intention of setting our house in order -- "to break the fallow ground" -- to prepare the way of the Lord.

My hope is that as we go on here we are not just going to gather information and statistics about revival, but that we are going to individually seek personal revival.

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