

Weeping Between the Porch and the Altar Part 1

by Leonard Ravenhill

The key to revival is intercession, and we need to weep between the altar and the door posts to experience a true revival.

Scripture: Joel 1:13

Topics: "Intercession", "Revival"

Description

Leonard Ravenhill emphasizes the urgent need for the church to return to a state of deep lamentation and intercession, as illustrated in Joel 1:13-17. He reflects on the early church's power, contrasting it with the modern church's complacency and materialism, and calls for a revival that is birthed through true prayer and brokenness. Ravenhill critiques the current state of preaching, arguing that knowledge of the Word is insufficient without a genuine relationship with the God of the Word. He warns that the church's prosperity has led to spiritual lethargy, and he urges ministers to weep for the lost and seek divine intervention for revival. Ultimately, he asserts that the key to revival lies in the heartfelt prayers of God's people, not in organized events or intellectual prowess.

Transcript

I'm not really going to preach a sermon this morning, but I want to have a launching pad... Joel 1:13 "Gird yourselves, and lament ye priests, howl ye ministers of the altar. Come, lay all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God. For the meat offering and the drink offering is withholden from the house of your God. Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly."

And then to verse 17 of the next chapter, "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, that the heathen should rule over them. Wherefore should they say among the people, Where is your God?"

A few years ago, Dr. Carl F. Henry, founder and editor of Christianity Today, sent out a questionnaire to what he called, "Twenty of the leading intellectual preachers in the country." And the question that he sent out was this: "What do you see for the church of Jesus Christ by the year 2000." I remember only one of the replies, it was given by Elton Trueblood, the Quaker philosopher. He said this amazing thing: "By the year 2000 the church will be a conscious minority surrounded by an arrogant, militant paganism." I

swallowed that hook, line and sinker, and woke up about 2 o'clock in the morning with mental and I think spiritual indigestion. Then I began to remind myself that Christianity was not served up to the world in a silver platter. Christianity was born in a sophisticated, totalitarian society.

The early church was walled in on one side with the mightiest military machine in history, the power of Rome.

It was walled in on the other side with Greek intellectualism.

It was blocked ahead by the monopoly the Jews thought they had on God.

Those men who turned the world upside down had

No colossal intellectual capacity.

No great financial backing.

No social standing.

They were about the most despised men in and around Jerusalem. And yet they broke out somehow - and later it was said that they turned the world upside-down.

I think at least once a week and sometimes I think once a day, what Dr. J. B. Phillips, who gave us the Phillips New Testament, said of the first chapters of Acts:

"This is the church of Jesus Christ before it became fat and out of breath by prosperity.

This is the church of Jesus Christ before it became muscle bound by over organization.

This is the church of Jesus Christ where they didn't gather together a group of intellectuals to study phycho-sematic medicine, they just healed the sick.

This is the church of Jesus Christ where they did not say prayers, but they prayed in the Holy Ghost." There's a vast difference.

The tragedy in our colleges and seminaries right now is that we turn men out who know the word of God. - That is never going to turn the world.

The question is not whether they know the Word of God.

The question is:

DO THEY KNOW THE GOD OF THE WORD?

Just to give a man a license to preach because he has so much academic ability is like giving a blind man a driving license. If he doesn't know God, why is he in this business?!

We have to make up our minds if this Book is absolute or obsolete. It's either got the answer for our generation or forget it.

We have to make up our minds that preaching is not a profession, it's a passion.

I remember going down High Holborne in London a few years ago... well it is a few, twenty five I guess. A little lady was going to the mail box. There she was, very, very stooped and she shakily put her mail into the box; then she turned to go into a building. Somebody asked me, "Do you know who that is?" And I said, "Not the slightest idea." "That is the widow of Hugh Price Hughes." At one time the king of the Methodist pulpit in England. His daughter gave us a huge biography of her father. And she said, "When he came back on a Sunday night from the service, if no one had been saved, he would be inconsolable. You couldn't comfort him. He wouldn't eat, he wouldn't drink. He wouldn't even take his long coat off. He threw himself over his bed and he sobbed and he sobbed and he sobbed and said, 'Why? Why? Why?'"

Isn't it staggering when you think that one sermon on the day of Pentecost produced 3000 people? And we had some cities yesterday where 3000 sermons were preached and nobody was saved. And it doesn't even faze us.

The church used to be a lightning bolt, now it's a cruise ship.

We are not marching to Zion - we are sailing there with ease.

In the apostolic church it says they were all amazed - And now in our churches everybody wants to be amused.

The church began in the upper room with a bunch of men agonizing, and it's ending in the supper room with a bunch of people organizing.

We mistake rattle for revival, and commotion for creation, and action for unction.

Look, I think this is a critical hour in history, the most critical hour in history; the Middle East is ready to blow up... the prestige of this nation we love has gone down ... As someone said, "We live in a theater of the absurd."

I'm old enough to remember years prior to World War I. My cousin had been to our house about a month before the war broke out, as straight as a ram-rod. He had his red jacket with its lovely gold buttons. I looked at him and thought, "My, what a marvelous thing to be a soldier." On the 4th of August 1914 the war broke out and he went with millions of other men to fight; he came back a total physical wreck. But you see, the slogan of World War I was this: "This is the war to end wars." War is not only unchristian, it's uncivilized.

After that, from 1919 to 1939, we had twenty golden years of peace when the church had the greatest opportunity since Pentecost, in my judgment. Then came the second World War.

Prior to World War I we had a group of intellectuals in England called Fabian Socialists. The red bearded man who gave us plays like Pygmalion and My fair lady, George Bernard Shaw, was one of the super intellectuals. Really, the leader was a self anointed and self-appointed prophet of a new world order; his name was H. G. Wells, a cocky little man. Those men did not talk about redemption, they did not talk about sin, they were just rationalists, they were just humanists. Away back in 1912, two years before the 1914 war, H. G. Wells said, "It is possible for us to have a new race of people by intellectual and biological processes. We don't need the Bible, we don't need the church, we can pull down the hills of wealth, we can fill up the valleys of poverty."

He didn't talk about sin and redemption and wickedness.

He talked about the adequacy of materialism.

He talked about the inevitability of progress.

He talked about the sufficiency of man.

They were going to bring in a new millennium by their own genius.

And then a shadow came over the sky. We had the 1914-18 war. And at the end, H. G. Wells and the gang were not so sure about things.

In 1939 came the 2nd World War. Well, H. G. Wells had written his outline of history, but the last book he wrote, in the middle of World War II, was not this rosy optimism. His last book was Mind at the end of it's Tether. And he said, "There is no hope for humanity." And he said one more sensible thing, "There is a little cavity somewhere in the human breast which can be filled by God and only by God."

We feel a little nervous these days of talking about human depravity. Well, heaven knows, there has never been as much depravity around as we have today. Look at the iniquity that was on the earth when the prophet Elijah came on the scene. The nation was in bondage to idolatry, and impurity, and infidelity, and indifference.

And it's my contention this morning that this pulpit is no place for puppets.

In this day in which we live it's prophets that we need.

A Jewish scholar says,

"The prophet, by the very nature of his calling, is a tragic figure. He has a fierce loyalty toward God and he has a broken heart over a lost nation."

We miss the mark telling people who are morally good, and very excellent many of them, that Jesus Christ came into the world to make bad men good. He did not. That's a fringe benefit.

The first argument God has with a man is not that he's bad,

it's that he is DEAD in trespasses and in sin.

And Christianity is the only Gospel in the world, the only message in the world, where a man's God comes and lives inside of him.

Where's the brooding of the Holy Ghost these days? When revival comes you don't daringly say, "Joe Smith is coming to preach this week, and he'll finish Sunday night." Where in the world did we get the idea that the Holy Spirit only comes at 11 o'clock Sunday morning and you send Him home at 12 o'clock. You want Him back at 7 at night 'til 8 and we don't need Him 'til Wednesday night. When revival comes the lights don't go out in the sanctuary for weeks and weeks and weeks.

I spent an afternoon in Wales in 1931 or 32 with an old man who had been one of the right hand men in the Salvation Army revival back in the 1880's. The man was eighty years of age. He told me about the amazing things that happened in their revivals. The men that would sit in the back seats, almost the scum of the earth, came in just to get warm, but they would get so worried when the old preacher William Booth was preaching one of his hell-fire messages, that they shred their hymn books. Begby, in his definitive work on William Booth, in the first volume I think, talks about the holiness meetings. And he said, "When the Holy Ghost came down and men resisted the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of God would lift people from the back of the sanctuary and carry them over the audience and drop them at the altar." And we think we've seen everything because two or three people get healed.

You can not standardize revival. I am not thinking of a church revival; I'm thinking of a national revival. There is only one hope for America and that is that we have a Divine intervention in the nation. Forget your denomination, forget your empty seats.

Let's see first of all how God grieves over the sin of the people,

and after all, when you look in the Old Testament, God's argument was not with the Amalekites, and Hitites and all the other "ites". God's problem in the Old Testament was Israel. God's problem today is not communism, Mormonism, Moonism or any other "ism." God's problem is His church today. We are so worldly.

A city wide crusade can cost two million dollars.

Revival doesn't cost a red cent, except broken hearts.

You can stage your revival; you can stage a city wide crusade; you can not stage Revival.

Revival is a mysterious divine intervention. I think one of the most awesome tasks given to man was given to John Baptist, when God said, "Prepare YE the way of the Lord."

You know, you talk about revival in this country and everybody has got tunnel vision. They think revival must come like Finney had it. We are not living in Finney's days. It would be nice to have him around, for sure, but we are not living in Finney's day. It is a new day. Iniquity has never swaggered like it swaggers now. You know what has happened in the last twenty three years in England? In the last twenty three years in England the Muslims have built 300 mosques and at the same time they were building their 300 mosques the Church of England has closed 660 churches. Does it drive us to despair? There are more people lost in this world at the moment than in any period in history. And yet we go on as though we were on the edge of the millennium instead of on the edge of judgment.

I believe the key to revival is given here in Joel, "Let the priests, the ministers of God, weep between the altar and the door posts."

I was preaching in a well known college two years ago. I was preaching on Hannah, because I think Hannah is typical of the true intercessor. The intercessor believes, "The thing will happen through me. I have to stand in the gap." You know, when you talk about intercessors we always go back and say, "Well, America's had some of the best intercessors." You're right; we had.

We had praying Payson of Portland back in the eighteen hundreds. The floor in his room was as hard as this metal and yet there were two grooves side by side where his knees used to rub in the floor.

What about Jonathan Goforth that went out and had revival in China?

What about John Hyde, one of the greatest men ever in prayer?

You know, the first thing that really moved me to God after I got saved? Somebody gave me an abridged edition of the life of David Brainard. I just could not believe it; I could not take it in. Could a man be so utterly selfless?

The thing that is crippling us is our prosperity. Materialism is choking the church as well as the world. We want ease and comfort.

When I read of a young man that could walk out in the snow, snow up to his chin sometimes, wrestling in prayer from sunrise to sunset with a tubercular body...

When I read about a man that wrestled in prayer like that, I was dumbfounded.

And since the church I went to was pretty sleepy and I was only about seventeen, I went out into Sherwood forest - I lived on the edge of it - and started praying by myself at night. We have some bracken there, and it grows seven or eight feet high, I used to creep in it and weep and groan and pray for revival. And revival came. Because I prayed? No, No. I was one of a number.

But a man called George Jefferys came. Very humble... He never stopped to meet you... never mentioned money...He just came there, they sang about one chorus, but the ministry and the authority of God was upon him, and again the Acts of the Apostles were repeated. I don't think that a move of miracles like that is the only answer. In fact I think we could by-pass that. In the last thirty years America has had more healing crusades than all the nations of the world put together.

What we need now is

A revival of holiness.

A revival of character.

A revival of people who are utterly selfless

and prepared to lay their lives on the altar for God.

Paul Koffman went to Nagaland, India, to see what happened and expected something like Finney. When he got there saw signs and wonders and miracles, cripples were healed, blind people were seeing, every distorted, perverted thing was put right. So what? Hey, did you ever hear of a revival like this? The government has made an inquiry. Why has the drink traffic gone down? Why is it the kids are behaving in the street? Why are we not having a problem with drugs? Why is the nation convulsed? Why is the government inquiring? They were the most rebellious, lawless state in India and now they are the calmest. The crime has gone. People are civilized and gentle and loving. Well, it's the same old story. They discovered a group of people, underground people, who had been praying twenty years for revival.

No man - I don't care how colossal his intellect - No man is greater than his prayer life.

To stand before men on behalf of God is one thing.

To stand before God on behalf of men is something entirely different.

We've urged people to tithe, haven't we? But we only mean their money. You see, we want a "revival" which is a painless Pentecost. We want something that won't disturb our status quo. It's "easy street" everywhere else, so why not here?

There never has been a revival that I can trace, that hasn't been birthed back there with true, true, true intercession.

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