

The Real Reason for Revival

by Martyn-Lloyd Jones

Praying for revival should be motivated by a desire to glorify God and bring him honour, rather than our own needs and problems.

Scripture: Exodus 33:12

Topics: "God's Glory", "Prayer For Revival"

Description

Martyn-Lloyd Jones emphasizes the importance of motives in prayer for revival, using Moses as a model of intercession. He highlights that Moses prayed not for personal gain but for the glory of God, the honor of the Church, and the salvation of the lost. The preacher urges believers to shift their focus from self-centered prayers to a deep concern for God's name and the state of His people. He calls for a revival of bold, confident, and urgent prayer that reflects a passion for God's glory and a desire for the world to recognize His sovereignty. Ultimately, Jones encourages the congregation to become intercessors like Moses, driven by a holy zeal for God's honor.

Transcript

And Moses said unto the Lord, See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight. Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now the way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people. And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. And he said unto him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name. (Exod. 33:12-17.)

Before we continue with our study of this great chapter from Exodus, let me remind you of what we have learned from it up to this point. Moses has prayed for a personal assurance as far as he himself is concerned; he has asked for power, power for himself and for the people and, thirdly, he has asked for some exceptional authentication of the Church and his message. And now we must go on to consider why he prayed for these things. What were his motives? Surely this is all-important for us, because, if I understand the situation at all, it is in this realm of purpose and of motives that we so constantly go wrong. We start at the wrong end. And, therefore, shall derive great benefit and instruction as we watch Moses

praying here. And, of course, you will find everywhere in the Scriptures that what is true of him at this point is true of God's intercessors, God's saints, as they plead with God, wherever you find them in the Scriptures. Moreover, I would remind you that if you read the history of the great revivals of the past, you will find that, as you read of the men whom God has used most signally, as you study them in the period before the revival came, when they were pleading and interceding, you will find invariably that they were animated by exactly the same motives as we find here in the case of Moses.

So we must be perfectly clear with regard to this matter of our motives. I am calling you to pray for revival. Yes, but why should you pray for revival? Why should anybody pray for revival? And the answer that is first given here is this: a concern for the glory of God. You will find it at the end of verse 13: 'Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight; and consider that this nation is thy people.' That is the motive. That is the reason. Moses was concerned primarily about the glory of God. Now, you will find that he constantly used this particular argument with God. There is an illustration of this in the previous chapter, chapter 32 verses 11 and 12. God was angry with the Children of Israel because they had made the golden calf and had rebelled against him, and God said to Moses,

I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation. And Moses besought the Lord his God, and said, Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? (Exod. 32. 9-12).

You see Moses' concern? He is concerned about the name, and, as it were, the reputation and the glory of God. And that is the point he is making here again. 'This nation,' he says, 'is thy people.' He is saying, in effect, that God's honour, and God's glory is involved in this situation. They are, after all, his people, they have claimed that, he has given indications of that, he has brought them out of Egypt in a marvellous and a miraculous manner. He has brought them through the Red Sea, is he going to leave them here in the wilderness? What will the Egyptians say? What will the other nations say? Has he failed? He promised them great things. Can he not execute them? Can he not bring them to fulfilment? Moses is suggesting to God that his own glory, his own honour, is involved in this whole situation. Now you will find this plea endlessly in the Psalms. You will find it constantly in the Prophets. Their prayer to God is, 'for thine own name's sake', as if to say, 'We have no right to speak, and we are not really asking it for ourselves, but for thine own name's sake, for thy glory's sake, for the sake of thine eternal honour.' Moses, thus, had a concern for and was jealous about, the name and the glory of God. And here he is asking God, for his own sake, to do this extra, this special, thing.

Now, we cannot go into all these points in detail, but this is the thing that matters is it not? The Church, after all, is the Church of God. 'She is His new creation, by water and word.' We are a people for God's own peculiar possession. And why has he called us out of darkness into his own marvellous light? Surely it is that we may show forth his praises, his excellencies, his virtues. And, therefore, we should be concerned about this matter primarily because of the name, and the glory, the honour of God himself. Whether we like it or not, it is a fact that the world judges God himself, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the whole of the Christian faith, by what it sees in us. We are his representatives, we are the people who take his name upon us, we are the people who talk about him, and the man outside the Church regards the Church as the representative of God. And, therefore, I argue that we must emulate the example of Moses,

as we find it here. Our first concern should be about the glory of God.

But am I being unfair when I suggest that this is scarcely ever mentioned? There is great concern about the Church today, of course, but what is the concern about? Today's concern is about statistics, and figures. People are talking about churches being empty, and they talk about means and methods of trying to fill them and of getting the people in again. They are interested in the figures, in membership, in finance, and in organization. How often do you hear annual conferences and assemblies expressing a concern about the glory of God, and the honour of the name of God? No, our attitude seems rather to be that the Church is a human organization, and of course we are concerned about what is happening to it, as a man is concerned if his business is not going well. We are businessmen, and we are concerned about the institution, and the organisation. But this was not Moses' primary concern. His first and chief concern was about the glory of God. Are you grieved at the state of the Church? If so, why are you grieved about it? Is it because you are old enough to remember the end of the Victorian era, or the Edwardian period, when it was the custom for people to crowd into churches? Is it just a sort of nostalgia for the great days of the Church? Or do we know something of a concern for the name of God? Are we pained? Are we hurt? Are we grieved? Does it weigh heavily upon our hearts, and minds, and spirits, when we see the godlessness that surrounds us, and the name of God taken in vain? Do we know something of this zeal, this holy zeal?

Have you noticed the concern of the Psalmist in Psalm 79, when he says, 'Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God?'. That is what they are saying. They are laughing as they say 'They talked about some great God, who was the God above every other god. They said that the God of Israel was the God, they gloried in him, they said he was wonderful. Where is he? Look at them! How can these people claim that they are in the hands of such a God? They would never be in such a condition if that were really true.' You see, what is involved, primarily, is the glory and the honour and the name of God. It is not our institutions, it is not our success or failure, that matters, the primary thing is the glory of God. Of course, the Psalmist sees it. Take the second Psalm, how well he puts it. 'The kings of the earth set themselves', he says, 'and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying....' Of course, they were attacking David, they were attacking the Children of Israel, but David has the insight of a spiritually minded man. He says, 'It is not against me, it is against God. It is against the Lord and his anointed that these people are setting themselves,'.

Indeed, this is the great theme that you will find running everywhere through the Psalms. Let me give you just one other instance of it, in Psalm 83. 'For, lo,' says the Psalmist, 'thine enemies make a tumult: and they that hate thee have lifted up the head. They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against the hidden ones.' Yes, but it is all against God. And there is that marvellous, and almost lyrical example to be found Acts 4.

After they had tried Peter and John and forbidden them to preach the gospel, the authorities were determined to exterminate the Church and put an end to all her preaching, so they made serious threats to the Apostles. Peter and John went back and they began to pray with all the assembled company of believers. And this is what they said-notice how they were quoting the second Psalm-'The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.' Then their own words, 'For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel, determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings...' (4.26-26). You see, they had a clear insight. You would have thought that they would have prayed entirely about themselves, but they did not do that primarily. They recognised that all that was happening was really

against God. And here is the thing, surely, that we must needs recapture. We are so subjective in our approach, always thinking about ourselves. And that is not the way to pray for revival. We must, in the first place, be concerned about God, his glory, his honour, his name.

This, to me, is the essence of the whole matter. Go through the great prayers of the Old Testament and you will find it always there. These men had a passion for God, they were in trouble, they were unhappy, because this great God was not being worshipped as he should be. And they prayed God for his own sake, for his glory's sake, to vindicate his own name and to arise and to scatter his enemies. That is the first thing.

Then the second thing-and it must always come in the second place, never in the first-is a concern about the honour of the Church herself. Incidentally, in this particular passage, there is nothing more wonderful than the way in which Moses shows his concern for the Church, which was then the nation of Israel. God had been giving Moses some wonderful intimations of his loving interest in him, but Moses is not content with that. Moses does not merely seek personal blessings. He wants to make sure that the Children of Israel, as a whole, are going to be involved in this blessing. He is given again a wonderful example of that in Exodus 32, one of the most glorious passages in the Old Testament. 'It came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the Lord; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin. And Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet ' pause. It is as if he broke down and could not speak any longer. He is in a great agony of soul-'Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin-... ' and then he is able to speak- 'and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written' (32:30-32). I do not want to go on living, he says, if you are not going to include them in the blessing.

God had said, 'I am going to blot out this people, I am going to make a nation out of you.' 'No,' says Moses, 'blot me out as well. I do not want to go on without them.'

Oh, this is true intercession. The man is concerned about the state of the whole Church, and his personal life and welfare and well-being are nothing to him, unless the Church is to be blessed. And here he is in this chapter repeating all that. 'Thy people, this nation.'

We could linger over this, but we must move on. I would simply leave it like this. It seems to me that there is no hope for revival until you and I, and all of us, have reached the stage in which we begin to forget ourselves a little, and to be concerned for the Church, for God's body, his people here on earth. So many of our prayers are subjective and self-centred. We have our problems and difficulties, and by the time that we have finished with them, we are tired and exhausted and we do not pray for the Church. My blessing, my need, my this, my that. Now, I am not being hard and unkind, God has promised to deal with our problems. But where does the Church come into our prayers and intercessions? Do we go beyond ourselves and our families? We stand before the world and we say the only hope for the world is Christianity. We say the Church, and the Church alone, has the message that is needed. We see the problems of society, they are shouting at us and they are increasing week by week. And we know that this is the only answer. Very well, then, if we know that and if we believe that, let me ask you in the name of God, how often do you pray that the Church may have power to preach this, in such a manner that all these citadels that are raising themselves against God shall be razed to the ground and shall be flattened in his holy presence? How much time do you give to praying that the preachers of the gospel may be endued with the power of the Holy Ghost? Are you interceding about this? Are you concerned about it? Moses, I say was more concerned about this than about himself. He would not go up alone to the

promised land. He did not want to be made the great man alone. 'No, it is the Church,' he said, 'I am not going on unless they are all coming with me, and with you in the midst.'

We must learn to think again about the Christian Church. Our whole approach has become subjective. It is subjective in evangelism, it is subjective in the teaching of sanctification, it is subjective from beginning to end. We start with ourselves, and our own needs and problems, and God is an agency to supply an answer, to give us what we need, but it is all wrong. Evangelism, and everything else, must start with God and his glory. The God who is over all and to whom all things belong. It is because men are not glorifying him that they need to be saved, not to have some little personal problem solved. And if the motive for evangelism is to fill the Churches, it is doomed to failure. Of course, you may fill your Churches, and it will not help you, it will not avail you, it will not make any difference to the main problems. It is this conception of the Church as the people of God, who bear his name and who have been brought into being by him, it is this that matters. We must cease to think of the Church as a gathering of institutions and organisations, and we must get back this notion that we are the people of God. And that it is for his name's sake, and because his name is upon us, we must plead for the Church. Yes, and for her glory and her honour, because she is his.

And then, of course, the third reason is that Moses is concerned about the heathen that are outside. He wants them to know: 'For wherein shall it be known here [in the wilderness, where we are], that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth.'

These are the motives in praying for revival. For the name, and honour, and glory of God and for the sake of the Church which is his. Yes, and then for the sake of those people that are outside, that are scoffing, and mocking, jeering, and laughing, and ridiculing. 'Oh, God,' say his people, one after another, 'arise and silence them. Do something so that we may be able to say to them, "Be still, keep silent, give up."

'Be still, and know that I am God' (Ps. 46. 10). That is the prayer of the people of God. They have got their eye on those that are outside. And you find illustrations of this right through the Bible. And this has been true also of all men who have felt the burden of the condition of the Church, and whose hearts are breaking because they have seen the name of God blasphemed. Oh, you will find it in very strong language here in the Bible, sometimes so strong that certain little people are troubled by the imprecatory Psalms. But the imprecatory Psalms are just an expression of the zeal these men have for the glory of God. 'Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth,' says the man in Psalm 104. There they are, he says, spoiling your great creation. I see the mountains, and the valleys, and the streams. I see the cedars of God which are full of sap.... He thinks of the birds and all creation conspiring together to show the wonder, and the glory of God. But here is the sinner, who, in spite of all God's goodness to him, still reviles, and rebels and blasphemes. And the Psalmist, in his righteous indignation and zeal, says, 'Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth.'

And that, I would say, is the real explanation of these people. It was not a desire for personal vengeance. It was that these men were consumed by a passion for God and his glory and his great name. And there is something wrong with us if we do not feel this desire within us that God should arise and do something that would shut the mouths, and stop the tongues of these arrogant blasphemers of today, who speak with their mincing words upon radio and television-these supposed philosophers, these godless arrogant men. Do we not feel, sometimes, this desire within us that they might know that God is God, and that he is the eternal God? Ah, yes, there is a desire that they may be answered, that they may be silenced, but it does

not stop at that, of course. Following that comes a desire that they may be convicted, that they may be convinced, that they may really see the truth. A desire that God should do something so strange, so wonderful, that they would be arrested and apprehended, and say, 'What is this? Are these people right after all? Do our arguments not seem to be falling astray? We thought that God had failed, that he had left them there in the wilderness. Everything was going against them.' Then if God should suddenly break in and do something miraculous, and lead them through, the heathen will have to think again and say, 'Ah, perhaps they were right after all.' And that is the first step in the direction of conviction and conversion. Their interest has been aroused, and whenever you get a revival that always happens. People who have always scoffed at the name of God, have gone to look on in sheer curiosity, and that has often led to their conversion. Now Moses is praying for that, that these people may be arrested and apprehended, and may develop an interest in which God is leading them, and is directing them.

This should make us ask, therefore, whether we are concerned at all about these people who are outside. It is a terrible state for the Church to be in, when she merely consists of a collection of very nice and respectable people who have no concern for the world, people who pass it by, drawing in their skirts in their horror at the bestiality, and the foulness, and the ugliness of it all. We not only want the scoffers to be silenced, we should desire that these men and women, who are like sheep without a shepherd, might have their eyes opened, might begin to see the cause of their troubles and be delivered from the chains of iniquity, and the shackles of infamy, and vice, and foulness. Are we truly concerned about such people and are we praying to God that he would do something, that they may be influenced and affected?

There, as I understand it, are the three main motives which animated Moses as he offered up these petitions to God. There is something else for us to notice and that is the way in which he prayed. We have seen what he prayed for, we have seen why he prayed for it, now let us watch his method of prayer. And if ever we needed instruction, it is just here.

There are certain elements that always come out in all the great biblical prayers, and the first characteristic of Moses' prayer is its boldness, its confidence. There is no hesitation here. There is a quiet confidence. Oh, let me use the term, there is a holy boldness. This is the great characteristic of all prayers that have ever prevailed. It is, of course, inevitable. You cannot pray truly, still less can you intercede, if you have not an assurance of your acceptance, and if you do not know the way into the holiest of all. If, when you get down on your knees, you are reminded of your sins, and are wondering what you can do about them, if you have to spend all your time praying for forgiveness and pardon, wondering whether God is listening or not, how can you pray? How can you intercede, as Moses did here? No, Moses was face to face with God, he was assured, he was bold with a holy boldness. As we have seen, God had granted him intimations of his nearness and so he was able to speak with this confidence and assurance.

Now this is absolutely vital to prayer. Do you know the way into the holiest of all? There is only one way-Hebrews 4.14 puts it so perfectly-'Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God....' Then the writer goes on to describe him as a high Priest who can be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. Then, he comes to the prayer, 'Let us therefore,' he says, 'come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.' You notice his 'therefore'? 'Therefore, let us come boldly.' What does it refer to? Oh, it refers to the truth about the great High Priest, Jesus, the Son of God, who has passed through the heavens, and to all the truth about him. That is the only way to be bold in the presence of God. If I look at myself I cannot be bold, I become speechless. With Job, I put my hand upon my mouth: 'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself

and repent in dust and ashes' (Job 42. 5-6). I cannot speak. But I must speak if I am to intercede. How can I do so with confidence and assurance? There is only one answer- it is to know that my great High Priest is Jesus, the Son of God, and that by his blood I have a right of entry into the holiest of all, and can go there with boldness. Notice the confidence and the assurance with which Moses prayed. And, if you read some of the prayers of the saints of the centuries, you will find this self-same thing.

But, there is a second point, which is most valuable and interesting, and that is the element of reasoning, and of arguing that comes in. It is very daring, but it is very true. Let me remind you of it. 'Moses said unto the Lord, See...'- which really means that he is arguing with God-'See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said....' You see, he is reminding God of what he had said. He is having an argument with God: 'And yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight. Now therefore,' says Moses, as if he were saying to God, 'Be logical, be consistent, carry out your own argument. You cannot say this to me and then not do anything.' 'Now therefore, I pray thee, if...'-still arguing-'if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people.' And then in verse 16, 'For, wherein-if you do not do this-'wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? Is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated....' He reasoned with God. He argued with God. He reminded God of his own promises and he pleaded with God in the light of them. He said, 'Oh, God, can you not see that having said this you must...?'

Is it right, someone may ask, to speak to God like that? Is this not presumption? No, these things go together. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews, who talked so much about our going boldly to the throne of grace, at the same time reminds us that we do so always with reverence and with godly fear. This is all right. What is happening here is this: we are not seeing a man under the Law speaking to the Law-giver. No, it is a child here speaking to his Father. And the little child can take liberties with his father that a grown-up man, who is not his child, would not dare to take. Oh, yes, this is a child speaking, and he knows it. God has spoken to him, as it were, face to face, and Moses knows that. And he comes with his love, and his reverence, and his godly fear, and he ventures to argue. He says, 'You have said this, therefore...

'Again I commend to you the reading of biographies of men who have been used by God in the Church throughout the centuries, especially in revival. And you will find this same holy boldness, this argumentation, this reasoning, this putting the case to God, pleading his own promises. Oh, that is the whole secret of prayer, I sometimes think. Thomas Goodwin in his exposition of the sealing of the Spirit in Ephesians 1.13 uses a wonderful term. He says, 'Sue him for it, sue him for it.' Do not leave him alone. Pester him, as it were, with his own promise. Tell him that what he has said he is going to do. Quote the Scripture to him. And, you know, God delights to hear us doing it, as a father likes to see this element in his own child who has obviously been listening to what his father has been saying. It pleases him. The child may be slightly impertinent, it does not matter, the father likes it in spite of that. And God is our Father, and he loves us, and he likes to hear us pleading his own promises, quoting his own words to him, and saying 'in the light of this, can you refrain?' It delights the heart of God. Sue him!

Another thing we should notice about prayer is its orderliness, its directness. The specific petition. Notice that Moses here does not offer up some vague, indefinite general prayer. No, he is concentrating on the one great need. Of course he worshipped God, of course there was the reverence and the godly fear, yes, but at this point he concentrates on this one thing, this presence of God. He will not get away from it. He

says, 'I will not move unless you come. You must come with us.' And he gives his reasons and plies him with all these arguments about it. And if I may speak for myself, I shall not feel happy and encouraged until I feel that the Church is concentrating on this one thing-prayer for revival. But we have not come to it, we are still in the state of deciding in committees to do this, that and the other, and asking God to bless what we have done. No, there is no hope along that line. It must be that one thing. We must feel this burden, we must see this as the only hope, and we must concentrate on this, and we must keep on with it-the orderliness, the arrangement, the concentration, the argument, and always the urgency. Moses here is like Jacob was in Genesis 32. This element always comes into true intercession. 'I will not let thee go,' said Jacob. I am going on. The morning was breaking, he had been struggling through the night.

'Let me go.'

'No, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.'

There is the urgency. Read the great biblical prayers; it is always in them. In Acts 4 we read of the Christians asking God to act 'Now.' Oh God, they said, in the light of this, in our situation now-do this. Give us some indication, give us some signs, enable us to witness with this holy boldness, and to bear witness to the resurrection that they are prohibiting us to speak about. See the urgency of the prayer. Moses keeps on coming back to it, repeating it, putting it in different forms and from different angles. But there was just this one thing: 'If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.' Insisting urgently, 'I will not let thee go.'

There, it seems to me, are some of the lessons from this passage. We say our prayers, but have we ever prayed? Do we know anything about this encounter, this meeting? Have we the assurance of sins forgiven? Are we free from ourselves and self-concern, that we may intercede? Have we a real burden for the glory of God, and the name of the Church? Have we this concern for those who are outside? And are we pleading with God for his own name's sake, because of his own promises, to hear us and to answer us? Oh, my God make of us intercessors such as Moses. It is no use anybody saying, 'Ah, but he was an exceptionally great man.' God, as we have seen in the past history of revivals, has made use of men who are mere nobodies in exactly the same way as he used Moses here. A hundred years ago, the unknown James McQuilken was the man whom God burdened in this way. He was the Moses in Northern Ireland. It can be any one of us. May God make of us intercessors such as Moses was.

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