

Reuben Archer Torrey & Revival

by Mike Attwood

This sermon delves into the life of Reuben Archer Torrey, highlighting his journey from a shy, reluctant individual to a powerful evangelist and revivalist. It emphasizes the importance of choosing wise companions, the impact of revival stories on inspiring prayer, and Torrey's multifaceted abilities as an academic, evangelist, apologist, writer, and Christian leader. The focus is on Torrey's humility, prayer life, and pursuit of the baptism of power for service, leading to significant global evangelistic campaigns and revivals.

Scripture: Proverbs 13:20, Psalms 85:6, 1 John 5:14, Luke 24:49, Matthew 7:7, James 5:16, Acts 1:8, Ephesians 3:20, 2 Chronicles 7:14, Mark 16:15

Topics: "Transformation", "Power of Prayer"

Description

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Transcript

It's the book of Proverbs chapter 13 and verse 20, Proverbs 13 20. It says this very familiar verse, he that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed. So it really is important who we choose to emulate, who we have as our heroes.

And I want to speak tonight about Reuben Archer Torrey, R.A. Torrey as they call him, and particularly his connection with revival. But we're going to do a kind of brief biographical sketch along the way. And it's very important, I think, because when we hear stories of revival and how they came about, it does fire us up to pray more earnestly.

Often when there is revival, it's because of reports of a revival somewhere else that just burdens people to get the same blessing and benefit where they are. So that's why it's good to tell these stories or retell these events. But anyway, R.A. Torrey, he was born in New Jersey, in the US in 1856.

And he died in Asheville, North Carolina in 1928. So 1856 to 1928. And if ever there was a man who was, you could say, was a great all-rounder, you'd have to say it would be R.A. Torrey.

He was, first of all, a brilliant academic, very scholarly. He was president of Moody Bible Institute. When they were looking for somebody to replace D.L. Moody, D.L. Moody was looking, who's my Elisha? And they said, without question, R.A. Torrey is your man.

And so he took over at Moody Bible Institute. And then latterly, he started Biola, the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, and again, was a lecturer there. So very brilliant academic.

He was also a powerful evangelist, as we're going to learn tonight, and an amazing soul winner. And we might call him a revivalist as well. If that wasn't enough, you know, to be an academic and to be an evangelist would be good, to have both of those strings in your bow, if you like, or arrows in your bow, that would be good.

But on top of that, he was also a tremendous apologist, very good at defending the faith, and particularly had a militant crusade against German higher criticism, and was very much a defender of the faith, was involved in authoring or editing a series called The Fundamentals, which was a kind of an argument against these radical views that denied the inspiration and authority of scripture. So he was a tremendous apologist as well. And as well as that, he was a very good writer and author who wrote lots of books.

So that's four things, and we're not done yet. He was a well-respected Christian leader as well, and a great man of prayer. Seldom do we see so much evidence in one individual.

And yet, despite all this incredible engiftment and ability, what we find is that he was a man of remarkable humility, never ever had an issue with thinking he was more important than he really was. A humble man throughout his life. So very impressive to have so much ability, and yet to be such a humble man.

His birth and upbringing that we mentioned, born in 1856, January the 28th, in Hoboken, New Jersey, to Reuben and Elizabeth. And his parents were believers, and his mother was a woman of prayer. Oh, what a wonderful thing it is to have mothers who are women of prayer, and he certainly had one.

At the time, his family was very affluent. His father was both a successful banker and also a lawyer. Wouldn't always be that way.

In fact, his father went bankrupt years later, and they ended up with very little. But nevertheless, his upbringing, he grew up in very comfortable circumstances. And he was an extremely shy child, never spoke in front of visitors, was petrified around people.

Just the kind of person God would use as a worldwide evangelist, somebody who is so petrified and shy. But that's the way God works sometimes, and that's the way he was. Although he grew up in a Christian home, he did not make a commitment to Christ.

In fact, one time he read a book on becoming a Christian, and was very deeply convicted through reading this book. But he thought that if he accepted the gospel, God might call him to be a preacher. And he was so petrified at the thought of standing up in front of people that he subdued all that conviction, and he just refused to respond to the gospel.

He went to Yale University, one of those Ivy League schools at 15 years of age. So obviously very smart. Goes to Yale and began to lead a worldly life.

Apparently he was a brilliant dancer. Not sure what dancing they did in those days, but whatever it was, he was good at it. And also just loved card playing and theater and all this.

Just a thoroughgoing worldling. So how did this man come to Christ? Well, in 1875, he had a very dramatic conversion. One night, still at Yale, he had a dream.

And in this dream, his mother came to him as an angel and asked him to preach the gospel. So his mother appearing as an angel, asking him to preach the gospel. And again, the very thought of preaching so petrified him that he got out of bed and determined he was going to end his life.

Rather than be a preacher, he said, I'd rather go into eternity unsaved. And he actually was looking for a razor to kill himself. And while he was looking for the razor that mysteriously had disappeared, he couldn't find it anywhere, his mother back in New Jersey felt burdened to pray for her boy.

She got out of bed. This is the middle of the night, knelt down by the side of the bed, prayed for her boy. She knew something was not right.

And finally, he gave up, he knelt down and said, Oh God, deliver me from this burden, and I'll even preach. And again, that's the thing that was holding him back, his unwillingness to preach. And so he finally surrendered his life to the claims of the Lord Jesus, believed the gospel that he'd known all along, but just had never, this fear of preaching was what had held him back.

And immediately he was overcome with a sense of peace. He graduated in 1875, went to the Yale Divinity School. Now he's going to train to be a preacher.

And he also began to evangelize, although he found it so difficult to speak in front of an audience, he had to have a chair to hold on to, to stop himself shaking as he was speaking to people. So you get the idea, this guy's really very, very apprehensive about speaking. And I want to talk about now, and again, I'm using the words, his words, so don't get offended at what I'm going to say, his prayer life, and then the baptism of power for service.

I want to talk about those two things. So first of all, in 1878, he heard a preacher called Dwight Lyman Moody, D.L. Moody. And he was so impressed with Moody, he went to speak to Moody about how can I be more effective in winning souls? And Moody wisely said to him, you just go at it.

That's it. You just go at it. And so he said, okay.

And so he went at it with even more zeal to seek to win the loss. Some of his former dancing partners were the first ones that he led to Christ. Some of the ladies he used to dance with.

But he became very effective in talking to people, a personal soul winner. He also read the works of Charles Finney and was greatly impressed by the writings of Charles Grandison Finney. And Finney and Moody had one thing in common.

Both these men believed in the baptism of the Holy Spirit for the endowment of power for service. And basically, they took it from this passage, Luke 24, and we're going to elaborate, talk about it a little bit more, but both Finney and Moody believed this and taught it and experienced it. And so let's just read Luke 24 and verse 49, where the Lord Jesus had said, and behold, I send you the promise of my father upon you, but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you be endued with power from on high, or clothed, that's

the word, clothed with power from on high.

And so they both believed that there was this empowerment specifically for service. And because he had read their writings, heard it from them, that's something that gripped him. He wanted this power for service, especially because you understand this guy's a nervous person in front of people.

And so they both did have that experience, both Moody and Finney, and described it in a very tangible way. But he hasn't had that yet, but he's very conscious of it. He graduated in 1878, was ordained a congregational minister, and he passed to the church in Garrettsville, Ohio from 1878 to 1882.

And it was while he was at Garrettsville that Torrey met and married his wife, Clara Smith. But he felt like he needed more education. And so he went with his wife to Germany to study at the universities of Leipzig and Erlangen in 1882 to 83.

And it's there where he was exposed to what we call higher criticism. It's things like Moses didn't write the Pentateuch, but there were several authors, there were several authors of the book of Isaiah. It's basically a worldview that denies the supernatural.

If you like, German higher criticism is the Sadducees of the Christian world. They don't believe in the supernatural. They don't believe the Bible is the word of God.

They've got a rational explanation for everything. And of course, let me just say this before I go any further. Much of evangelicalism today is greatly affected by higher criticism.

And if you read some of the more academic commentaries, it's full of that stuff. So you've got to be really careful with this kind of stuff. Anyway, he was exposed to it, was impressed by it because it seemed so impressive.

In fact, he went along with them for a while, but then he began to realize the dangers of it, the errors of it, and he became their greatest opponent. And of course, he had a lot of credibility because he's not only got qualifications from Yale, an Ivy League school, but he's even been through their schools and he comes out the most fierce opponent in that generation of higher criticism. And we thank God for that.

I really appreciate that about him. And anyway, when he came out, he took a pastor in Minneapolis called the People's Church. Again, he was there, well, Opendoor Church, 1883 to 86, the People's Church, 87 to 89.

And he was also in charge of the Congregational Missionary Society during those years. And it was during those years that he read George Mueller's Life of Trust. And prayer became central to Torrey's relationship with God.

People that knew him closely said, you can say all you want about R. A. Torrey, but first and foremost, he was a man of prayer. And in class with his students, Moody and also at Biola, they said they learned more from him in the times of prayer than they did in his lectures. And they said his lectures were brilliant, but to listen to the man pray was something else.

And so again, a great man of prayer, but greatly influenced by George Mueller. So I just want you to see the influence of these individuals on a life. D. L. Moody, Charles Granderson Phinney, and now George Mueller, all these men are helping to shape this man, Reuben R. Torrey.

Anyway, let's go back to this baptism of power. He's still crying out to God to baptize him with the Holy Spirit. He knew he needed God to have more of him rather than he needed more of God.

Now, when you think about that statement, he knew that he needed God to have more of him rather than he needed more of God. And think about that. You see, when you get saved, the Holy Spirit comes to live within you.

You get all the Holy Spirit. But the real issue is, does he have all of you? Really, that's what it comes down to. It's this yielded, if you like, consecrated life, and he recognized that was what was needed.

And then he says this, and these are his words, I recall the exact spot where I was kneeling in prayer in my study. It was very quiet. One of the quietest moments I ever knew.

Then God simply said to me, not in an audible voice, but in my heart, it's yours. Now go and preach. Because this experience of baptism of power is yours.

Now go and preach. He had already said it to me in his word. 1 John 5, 14 and 15.

Let me just read those verses to us. 1 John 5, 14 and 15. It says this, and this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.

And if we know that he hear us, if we know that he hear us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. And so he said, he heareth us. He knew from scriptures that God had heard him, and he had answered his prayer, and he had empowered him to preach the gospel.

He says, I went to preach. I have been as if I had become a new minister from that day forward. There was his his preaching changed dramatically.

There was a power, there was an authority that accompanied his preaching from that point on. He said, sometime after this experience, I do not recall just how long after, while sitting in my room one day, suddenly I found myself shouting. I was brought up, I was not brought up to shout, and I'm not a shouting temperament, but I shouted like the loudest shouting Methodist.

Glory to God, glory to God, and I couldn't stop. But that was not when I was baptized with the Holy Spirit. I was baptized with the Holy Spirit when I took him by simple faith in the word of God.

Torrey had his church after this event hold meetings where they were asking for the Holy Spirit to bring revival across the world. Okay, so this this new energy, he now directed to the church, they're crying out for revival. And a delegation came from Melbourne, the churches of Melbourne, Australia, and they asked R.A. Torrey, as they're praying for worldwide revival, would you come and conduct evangelistic crusades in Melbourne, Australia? So in 1902, Torrey felt God was calling him to this worldwide evangelistic tour, and he asked a former student, Charles M. Alexander, so Torrey and Alexander, those partnered together, to go to Australia to be part of this campaign.

Meeting in 50 different centers, a fire broke out in Australia as thousands were led to Christ. An amazing move of the Holy Spirit. He spent the next six months, basically, crossing Australia, Tasmania, New Zealand, preaching the gospel, seeing multitudes come to the Savior.

It was an amazing revival. And some people suggest that the Welsh revival really came about as a direct consequence of the 1902 Melbourne revival. Because the word of this revival began to spread across the

world, and places in other countries began to pray, would you do it here? In fact, they even came, a delegation came from Wales and invited R.A. Torrey and Alexander to come and have ministry in Wales.

And they particularly said, be sure to bring the book of worship hymns that you used in that campaign, and particularly the glory song. We want the glory song. Oh, that will be glory to me, which Bob sang for us.

And that's why I wanted that, because it was so impactful during that time in Melbourne, Australia. People were singing it everywhere. It seemed the nation was on fire.

During the last two weeks, the meetings were held in an exhibition building. See, in 8,000 people, up to 15,000 were trying to get in nightly. Now think about that.

8,000 capacity, 15,000 trying to get in. Amazing. It says there were 8,600 converts were recorded, and news of the awakening stirred all Christendom.

This is just an example of how he worked. It says in one Australian city, a largely built man thundered at Torrey while he was preaching. I'm not a Christian, he says, but I'm a moral, upright, honorable, and blameless man, and I'd like to know what you have against me.

Torrey looked at him straight in the eyes and replied, I charge you, sir, with high treason against the king of heaven. And the man was so convicted, he got saved. Now again, this is the guy that, if you remember, used to hold onto a chair to speak because he was so nervous.

Now he has such holy boldness. I charge you, sir, with high treason against heaven's king. From there, there were invitations to India, Scotland, France, Germany, Wales, and a tremendous move of the Spirit of God.

London's Royal Albert Hall, he booked that from February to June 1905. It was announced at the end of the meetings that over 1 million people had attended those evangelistic meetings in the Royal Albert Hall in London. Over 17,000 people professed Christ.

And so this was the ministry of R. A. Torrey. Now, these are some of his quotes on revival, and I'm just going to give you them quickly, and then I'm going to draw four practical lessons for us to conclude. First of all, this is what he wrote.

Will thou not revive us again that thy people may rejoice in thee? Psalm 85, 6. He says, I have a theory that there is not a church, chapel, or mission on earth where you cannot have revival, provided there is a little nucleus of faithful people who will hold onto God until he comes down. You get that idea? A group of people, small nucleus, could be holding onto God till he comes down, till he visits with revival. He said, first let a few Christians, and there need not be many, get thoroughly right with God themselves.

This is the prime essential. If this is not done, the rest I'm going to say will come to nothing. In other words, the Christians themselves have got to be right with God.

Second, let them bind themselves together in prayer groups to pray for revival until God opens the heavens and comes down. Third, let them put themselves at the disposal of God for him to use them as he sees fit in the winning of others to Christ. That is all.

This is sure to bring revival to any church or any community. I have given this prescription around the world. It has been taken by many churches and many communities, and in no instance has it ever failed.

It cannot fail. He says this, we're too busy to pray, and so we're too busy to have power. We have a great deal of activity, but we accomplish little.

Many services, but few conversions. Much machinery, but few results. Then he made this comment about D.L. Moody.

He says, out of a very intimate acquaintance with D.L. Moody, I wish to testify that he was a far greater prayer than he was a preacher. Time and time again, he was confronted by obstacles that seemed insurmountable, but he always knew the way to overcome all difficulties. He knew the way to bring to pass anything that needed to be brought to pass.

He knew and believed in the deepest depths of his soul that nothing was too hard for the Lord, and that prayer could do anything that God could do. So, four lessons for us to take on board, and this is just a brief sketch. This man's life is of great magnitude, really, so we're just kind of a brief taster.

But I think, first of all, like Torrey, we must have absolute confidence in the inspired, infallible Word of God and preach it like we believe it. Okay? I think his whole battle with higher criticism was this. Can this book be trusted? Is it the inspired Word of God? If we don't have that, we don't have anything.

That's the first foundation. Secondly, we must be a people given to prayer. That's why we're part of this group, right? We see that.

We see that important. And then, thirdly, we desperately need divine power in service. Now, whatever you want to call it, I don't care what you want to call it, all right? My point is we lack it.

We desperately lack power. We have sermons, gazillions of sermons preached, but very little impact. We need divine power.

And so, whatever it takes, let's get it, right? Whatever you want to call it. I'm not going to argue all the, you know, maybe I would not have described it in the terms R.A. Torrey described it. But what I say is, I'd rather have what he had than have my theology and not have that.

Right? He had power with God, and we lack that, and power with men. And then, fourthly, we need vision that is bigger than just our backyard. This man had a prayer meeting for revival to sweep the world.

And there was a revival that affected five continents. And the beginnings of it may well have been the prayer meetings that were constituted in his church. So, that's Mr. Reuben Archer Torrey.

At least that's a little look at him. And I hope it would encourage us to pray on that we might see something similar in our day. We may not be these 10 talent guys like R.A. Torrey, but he's able to use the weak and foolish things in this world.

May God encourage us.

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