

This Is That

by Vance Havner

The Church needs a revival to regain its first love and fervor, and to be a witness to the world.

Scripture: Joel 2:28, Acts 2:12-37

Topics: "Revival", "Living Faith"

Description

Vance Havner emphasizes the need for the modern church to recapture the fervor and radiance of the Early Church, which was marked by a powerful experience of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. He reflects on the complacency of contemporary Christians who, despite their belief, fail to live out their faith passionately. Havner calls for a sweeping revival that encompasses all ages and a genuine weeping for the state of the church, urging believers to seek God's glory above all else. He warns against the dangers of compromise with the world and stresses the importance of boldness in proclaiming the Gospel. Ultimately, he challenges the church to return to its roots and live out the transformative power of the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

"What does this mean?" -- ACTS 2:12

"This is that..." -- ACTS 2:16

"What shall we do?" -- ACTS 2:37

It was Sunday morning in the little village where I was vacationing. I attended the local church, the usual morning service typical of most village church services over the land. I sat, a stranger in the congregation, and looked over the gathering. I could pick out the deacons. The people were respectful and listened fairly well to the earnest young preacher. They were not particularly stirred but they did not go to sleep. Presently everybody left the church with a comfortable sense of having done their duty.

I could not help reflecting, as I sat in that meeting: "If we really believed the glorious things this preacher is talking about, these stupendous truths we have gathered here to perpetuate, would we sit so listlessly and go out so lifelessly? After all, if two thousand years ago there lived on this earth a Man who was also God, if He was all He claimed to be and if He did all the record says He did, we ought to be excited about it!"

What shall we do to recover the lost radiance of the Christian faith? Strange thing about us Christians: we would not leave our faith for anything, but neither will we live it! We would not give it up, but neither do we

give it out. "Man has never been willing to give up the next world for this or this world for the next." We are afraid not to give something to the cause of Christ: we are equally afraid to give it everything. And yet, if it is worth anything it is worth everything. Who will arise in all the babel of our confusion, the rattle of our empty worship, the whirl of our religious wheels-within-wheels, and recapture the fervor of the first apostleship? We shall have a dull time of it until we either live our faith or take down our sign.

The study of the Acts of the Apostles is always a delightful experience, for something was happening every minute in those days. It can be a disturbing experience, for it shows us up in all our complacency and coldness. And it can be a depressing experience, for when one compares the flaming fervor of the first church with the pitiful imitation we behold today it is evident that a lot of water has run under the bridge since those days.

Human nature has not changed; the human heart is the same. The Early Church met about the same kinds of problems we face today, the same combinations of opportunity and opposition, "open doors and many adversaries." They wore different clothes and were called by different names, but essentially the same issues were involved. But then the church was in conflict with the forces without; now she is at a compromise with them. Then it was antagonism: now it is often alliance.

The Early Church met Sadduceeism. The Sadducees denied the resurrection, they were rationalists. We call them modernists, a misnomer, for modernism is not modern; it is one of the mustiest things in existence. We have had it ever since men first doubted God's Word and denied the supernatural. But the Church today is not meeting Sadduceeism as the Early Church met it. Then it was outside the Church; now it is inside, even in pulpits, where we are told that the Bible merely contains God's Word. Bob Ingersoll was an agnostic, but he was honest enough to stay out of the pulpit. Not all of his successors have shown that much consistency.

The Early Church met pharisaism. That was ritualism, form without force. Once again, what was outside the Church then is inside now. And do not think that "having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof" applies only to liberal churches. There are fundamental fellowships, right in their dispensations and wrong in their dispositions, resting at ease in Zion, snug and smug in their orthodoxy, but just as powerless in their holier-than-thou Pharisaism as the groups they censure.

The Early Church encountered Ananias and Sapphira. Their sin did not lie in giving part or in keeping part but in pretending that the part was the whole. The Church was at such a fever heat of consecration that liars could not stand it. If we had spiritual purity like that in our sanctuaries there would be corpses all over the place. But today men, with fingers crossed, one hand behind their backs, sing, "I surrender all." Although we have had courses galore in stewardship and have been told countless times that we are not our own but are bought with a price, we still withhold from God our time and talents and money and, above all, ourselves. We are not in contrast with Ananias and Sapphira but in collusion with them!

The Early Church met persecution. Peter and John were forbidden to preach in the Name of Jesus. But instead of praying for diplomacy the church prayed for more boldness, the thing that got them into trouble in the first place. From then on, the path of the church was a path of blood and fire, but "the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church." The church always has prospered in persecution but suffered in prosperity. She is "secure in danger but endangered by security." She has always been rich when poor, and poor when rich. She has had least treasure in heaven when she has had most money in the bank. You cannot stop the church by persecution: cut off one head and two more will appear. But if you want to

smother the church, patronize and popularize her. Fill her rolls with the worthless names of unregenerate members. Fill her offices with unconsecrated worldlings, her choirs with unsaved singers, her societies with social climbers, and you will discover that what Satan could never accomplish as a roaring lion of persecution he can achieve as a patronizing angel of light.

The Early Church met idolatry. I am thinking of Paul in Athens. He did not come to Athens as a tourist but as an evangelist, and as he walked in that center of art and culture he saw only their need of Christ. It has been said that "the ugly little Jew had no eye for beauty," but he did have. He had seen Jesus, and it had utterly spoiled him for everything else.

"He had seen the face of Jesus, tell him not of aught beside;

He had seen the face of Jesus and his soul was satisfied."

In Athens Paul saw only a city given to idolatry. He did not sit around discussing the favorite subjects of those Athenians forever chasing some new thing. He had only one subject and he lost no time getting around to it. They listened until he came to the resurrection and repentance, and then, like many in the twentieth century, they smiled him away. Today they tell us preachers that when we go to Athens we should read up on their favorite subjects, and we have done so. Instead of meeting the intellectualism of the age with the resurrection and a call to repentance, we have gone in for book reviewing. We have joined the clubs of Athens; we have attended her pink teas and laughed at her jokes. We have modeled our sermons to tickle her ears. (For further information read the sermon subjects in Saturday newspapers!)

Paul left Athens, never to return. He went back to places where he was persecuted, but he had no time to waste on the mild, intellectual curiosity which we court so fervently today.

The Early Church met demonism, in Philippi and Ephesus, for instance. Paul, as usual, had a head-on collision. If you think our cities are any better today you don't know our cities. Never was demonism more rampant. Walk up and down the streets, listen to the hellish jungle music floating from every haunt of sin. Listen to the foul blasphemy that fills the polluted air. Read the hideous crimes in our newspapers. If you are honest you will conclude that demonism is no outmoded superstition of an ignorant past. But the church today is not meeting it as Paul met it; she is trying to handle it with psychiatry instead of preaching. She has forgotten that only when the Stronger Man has bound the strong man can we say: "Greater is he that is in me than he that is in the world."

The Early Church met Apollos. A learned man, a disciple of John the Baptist, he was living up to the light he had. He did not know the full truth of the Gospel or the power of the Spirit until he sat at the feet of Aquila and Priscilla. Sometimes there are preachers who need to sit at the feet of some of their own congregation, as Apollos sat here and as Moody sat centuries later, to learn the deeper lesson of the endowment from on high. And there are many churches no farther along than Apollos. There are congregations of whom it might truly be said, so far as experience is concerned, "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Spirit."

No matter what the Early Church met, she met it triumphantly. What is the matter with us that we do not follow her example? What shall we do to recapture the lost radiance? We are up to our ears in problems, and we generally end up our discussions by saying, "And there's nothing you can do about it." Is there nothing we can do about it? Are we to accept conditions as they are, fold our hands, and say, "Let well

enough alone; things could be worse"?

There was a reason for the radiance of the Early Church, and that reason was Pentecost. Two questions were asked by the people who looked on that day: "What does this mean?" and "What shall we do?" Today we are trying to reverse the order. We are trying to make men ask, "What must I do to be saved?" before they have seen enough in our churches to make them inquire: "What does this mean?" We are emphasizing evangelism without revival, which is not God's order. When men first have been amazed by a church filled with the Spirit we may expect them to inquire further as to the way of salvation.

"What does this mean?" they asked. Peter said, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel." Now, there is more in the prophecy of Joel than this quotation that may be applied to our profit today. Joel lived in a day of trouble, of calamity and judgment. We live in a day of judgment which has begun at the house of God, corrective judgment for the saint and condemnatory judgment for the sinner.

Joel was a revivalist. He called first for A SWEEPING REVIVAL. It was a call to all ages: "Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth from his chamber and the bride out of her closet." A revival may be spearheaded by youth, for example, but to be a real revival it must reach all ages. Middle-aged people are too inclined to sit back and let the young people go forward. We are told in Acts that the man who was healed was over forty years of age. When anything phenomenal happens to the forty-year-olds these days it is worthy of special mention. Preachers were included in Joel's call: "Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep . . ." What is needed today is a stirring of God's Spirit among all ages, all groups, in pulpit and pew.

Joel called also for A WEEPING REVIVAL: "Gird yourselves and lament, you priests: howl, you ministers of the altar: come, lie all night in sackcloth, you ministers of my God . . . Sanctify a fast, call a solemn meeting, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry unto the Lord." It reminds us of James: "Be afflicted and mourn and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to heaviness." Mr. Finney used to say there could be no revival until Mr. Amen and Mr. Wet-Eyes could be found in the congregation.

David tells us that what God wants is a broken and contrite heart. Nehemiah wept. Paul warned men night and day with tears. Jesus wept. The Spirit prays for us with unutterable groanings. We had better groan a little for ourselves!

Joel gives us the proper motive for revival. The ministers were to pray: "Spare your people, O Lord, and give not your heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule [or use a by-word against] them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?" Men are by-passing the Church today and saying in derision, "Where is your power? Where is the Holy Spirit you talk about? You have nothing from heaven." Why do we want revivals? Preachers sometimes want them in order to increase their membership. Sometimes we want our loved ones saved so that they will be easier to live with. All this is selfish. We are not to want revival primarily for the world's sake or America's sake or even the churches' sake but for God's sake, for the honor of His Name, that the world may no longer pass by and jeer. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us but unto your name give glory for your mercy and for your truth's sake. Why should the heathen say, Where is their God?"

Then Joel pleads for A REAPING REVIVAL, and there will always be a harvest, both material and spiritual. "Then will the Lord be jealous for his land and pity his people." Has God not told us that if His

people repent He will forgive and heal the land? Joel says He will send corn and wine and oil. Under grace, as well as back then, there are physical by-products in a genuine revival. God will restore the years which the locust has eaten, says Joel, and He has done just that again and again. And there will be the pouring out of His Spirit as there was at Pentecost and as there may be in gracious infillings when the Church turns to the Lord. Notice that just as all ages were invited by Joel to repent, so all ages share in the blessing. The Spirit is to be poured out on all flesh: sons and daughters shall prophesy, old men shall dream dreams, and young men see visions: servants and handmaidens shall receive the Spirit. And there will be the reaping of souls for whoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved. After the Church has her lost joy restored and is upheld afresh by the Spirit, transgressors will be taught God's ways and sinners be converted.

The Church will not get on its feet until it first gets on its knees. Ezekiel said, "The Spirit entered into me and set me upon my feet." After we have repented and are Spirit-filled, we shall stand on our feet in testimony and men shall first ask, "What does this mean?" and then, "What shall we do?"

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