

Fire in the Pulpit!

Characteristics of Revival Preaching

Revival Preaching is Visionary

Revival men look beyond what is to what can be! God told Ezekiel to preach to a valley of dry bones and they were *very dry*. This man of God followed the Lord's directives and saw a miraculous revival in a bone yard. He was more than an analyst, more than a diagnostician; he was a visionary.

Jesus said, *If thou canst believe, thou shalt see the glory of God*. We must *believe* first. Then we shall *see*. Conservative Christianity is locked into a mentality of defeat. Few liberals are better at removing the miraculous element from present-day faith than many who boast of their undying allegiance to the Scriptures. One pastor stated, "I don't see any revival on the horizon." Brethren, you must stop walking by sight and start walking by faith! Somebody has to move beyond the Natural and plug into the Supernatural. Unless you can hope for a better day there will be no better day. Someone penned these words, *Hope is the companion of power, and the mother of all success*.

The time has come to stop limiting God by our unbelief. Take note of this quote by John Mason, "Mediocrity is a region bordered on the north by compromise, on the south by indecision, on the east by past-thinking, and on the west by a lack of vision." Faith is the only way men can relate to God. Non-faith hinders God. Unbelief binds the Holy Spirit, but *all things are possible to him that believeth* (Mark 9:23). Your actions will follow your expectations. The time has come to move beyond our frame of reference and believe God *to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us*, (Eph. 3:20).

Revival Preaching Yields to Holy Spirit Direction

Revival preaching is more concerned about an outcome than an outline. The revival preacher is more aware of his text than the time. He is bent on pleasing the Lord rather than pleasing men. His ear is tuned to hear and heed the voice of God.

After a sermon one evening a lady came to me and said, "I didn't get much out of your message tonight, but when your wife gave her testimony, God

spoke to my heart.” That night I learned that God can speak powerfully through the real-life testimonies of the saints. Often it is the life application of truth which brings stunning conviction upon the listeners. A salient feature in many revival movements has been the use of personal testimony.

Testimonies will never replace the exposition, illustration, and application of Scripture. However, the extraordinary “times of refreshing” are different from the ordinary seasons in the life of a local church. God’s humble servants learn to “flex” under the illuminations and promptings from God in the amazing seasons called revival. The preacher must yield to the Holy Spirit and say, “Not my will, but thine be done.” The man in tune with God learns that God’s ways are often different from his ways. He does not dictate to God the way things should go, but defers to the guidance of the Spirit. Revival services are unpredictable, and flexibility is required.

Recently, I was privileged to be in a revival-ready church. The opening prayer meeting on Saturday night was UNUSUAL. Tenderness, tears, anticipation, and enthusiasm are words which fall short of adequately expressing the atmosphere of excitement. We hit the ground running, and around twenty people got saved that first Sunday morning. After the message Thursday evening, the pastor opened the floor for testimonies. Some shared about their new-found salvation, Christians related their victories, and others shared their overwhelming burdens. When individuals shared problems, the pastor asked for others to come and pray over them. Twenty to fifty people would be up front praying over someone while others were testifying. It was ORGANIZED, SANCTIFIED CHAOS! All this was happening, and yet everything seemed in order. By eleven o’clock that night, there must have been over 200 people spread out all over the building praying over individuals. The sense of God’s presence was out of this world!

Revival Preaching is Compelling

Paul said, “*Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is me if I preach not the gospel!*” (1 Cor. 9:16). The instrument in revival is compelled to speak the things he has seen, heard, and felt. I have heard it said, “A message prepared in the mind reaches the mind. A message prepared in the heart reaches the heart. And a message prepared in the life reaches other lives.”

A pastor was speaking in a conference on the subject of “Revival.” He prefaced his message with derogatory comments on the whole notion of revival. Then he discouraged the use of personal testimony because he

feared people might tend to identify with someone's experience instead of their doctrine. Next he explained how he simply assigned himself a text and prepared his sermon for this conference. There we sat unmoved for the next hour listening to his cerebral ramblings. [Too much elaboration with too little exhortation results in exasperation!] The following speaker stood and rebuked him by saying, "You should not worry about people emulating your experience if you have no experience worthy of emulation!"

Countless congregations have never been better informed and less inspired. It has been said that all preaching should: stretch the mind, warm the heart, challenge the will, and tan the hide. The man who is compelled to speak is likely to compel his hearers to action. The revival preacher is not preaching *about* revival, he is preaching *for* revival!

Revival Preaching is Prophetic

"Consensus is the absence of leadership," said Margaret Thatcher. This maxim holds true in the realm of revival preaching as well as in politics. The aim of preaching in revival is heart-felt contrition, not consensus.

Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins (Isaiah. 58:1). Isaiah was not commissioned to console the people of Israel in their sin, but rather to expose it. His goal was not to swell their heads, but to prick their hearts!

William Booth said, "When preaching the Gospel, shoot to kill!" Men like Whitefield, Edwards, and Wesley who saw Awakening were not entertainers. They used the Sword of the Spirit to zero in on the consciences of men. In the white heat of revival people are stricken with conviction. The Spirit-empowered preaching in the early church was powerful: *When they heard that, they were cut to the heart* (Acts 5:33). Every dark spot is exposed in the light of God's presence.

When the preacher is proclaiming to the ears, and the Holy Spirit is speaking to the heart, the Word of God reaches its mark. All revival men preach for a verdict. Any who are halting between two opinions are compelled to make a choice. People who sit under such anointed preaching respond in anguish or in anger.

Jonah, the reluctant missionary, was sent to Nineveh to thunder out the righteous judgment of God against that wicked city. The king was so moved

that he called all of his citizens to fasting and repentance. The threat of imminent judgment terrified the king. The king and his subjects chose to humble themselves, confess their sins, and turn from their wicked ways. By judging themselves they averted the judgment of God.

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter was preaching in a super-charged atmosphere. Their ten day prayer meeting had paved the way for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. When Peter stood before that crowd, his confrontational preaching staggered his audience.

*Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain . . . Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said . . . Men and brethren, **what shall we do?** (Acts 2:23, 36-37).*

The miracle working power of God enabled men to hear the truth in their own language. Some thought Peter and his cohorts were drunk, but they were wrong. These men were intoxicated with God! Those who heard his words were smitten in their hearts and cried, “Men and brethren what shall we do?”

Revival Preaching is Consuming

The Old Testament prophets proclaimed “the burden of the Word of the Lord.” Prophets are God’s emergency men who labor under the onus of a God-ordained message blazing in their hearts.

Jeremiah said, *I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay* (Jer. 20:9). Though temporarily discouraged, the weeping prophet had to utter the message God had burned into his heart. He could not escape the responsibility to speak this “word” into his generation.

The revival preacher stands between time and eternity. He preaches as a dying man to dying men. He has so internalized the message that it becomes a part of him. In a sense, he becomes the incarnation of his message. He is possessed with the conviction that he has a word from God for the people.

The things of earth take the backseat in periods of revival. Duncan Campbell said, “We are living in a day when in the field of Christian activity everything seems real but God.” However in revival the illusions of time give way to eternal things. During the Great Awakening Jonathan Edwards said, “The minds and hearts of the whole town were taken off the things of the world and strongly focused on the things of the world to come.” Before delivering his famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” Edwards prayed and fasted for three days. Though a man of lofty intellect, he was utterly consumed with this word for the church.

A man was preaching in the open air near a region called the Black Hills as Wales was ablaze with revival. He took as his text that quote from The Song of Solomon, *The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.* His message blazed with such reality that the people looked to the mountains to see if Jesus was literally descending upon them! Revival preaching brings eternity to bear upon time.

Revival Preaching is Powerful

“Unction in the preacher puts God in the gospel,” said E.M. Bounds. It may not be word-perfect, but it carries a divine dimension. Somebody came to D. L. Moody after his message and told him he had made fifteen grammatical errors. Moody replied, “That is all God gave me, but I would have made more if He had given them to me!” Don’t let the criticisms from small-minded individuals disturb you. When it comes to unction, someone put it this way, “I cannot explain to you what unction is, but I can tell you when it is not there!”

One of my college professors used to say, “Don’t preach to ***Inform***—preach to ***Transform***!” The only type of preaching that transforms is unctionized preaching. All Biblical preaching is centered on Truth, but revival preaching is more than giving out additional information. Anointing is the divine element that makes preaching potent and transformational. Note the way Paul described it, *For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost* (1 Thes. 1:5). It was the miraculous, dynamite power of God that made an indelible impression upon the people. Mere logic, giftedness, and style are not the determining factors in the *times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord*. As the Authorized Version puts it, it is the power of the *Holy Ghost* that makes the difference!

Two ladies left their church service one Sunday morning and were walking home. Both were silent for a while until one of them said, “We had a good measure of the presence of God in the service this morning.” In revival God draws “feelingly near.” His presence overshadows all human factors and makes the preaching powerful.

Revival Preaching is Born in Prayer

Peter, along with 120 other repentant disciples, spent ten days praying in an upper room. With their flagrant denials of Christ still fresh on their minds, all confidence in the flesh had been decimated. Peter emerged from the upper room with holy fire burning in his soul. When he stood to preach on the day of Pentecost, three thousand were swept into the Kingdom! But God moved *in*, and *on*, His people prior to this massive harvest. Throughout history we see God always sets His people to praying prior to the mighty outpourings of the Holy Spirit.

I have heard that before D.L. Moody preached he would get alone and pray. An intense prayer burden would consume him for a season as he lay on his back. There, he would remain in anguish. When the burden lifted he knew he had secured the favor of God for that service.

A couple of Salvation Army workers were laboring in an evangelistic mission with few results. They wrote General William Booth to express their dismay. He wrote back with two words, “Try tears.” Whenever you find a church where people weep over the lost you see people get saved. And wherever you find men and women in soul agony for revival you are likely to have a divine visitation!

Revival Preaching is Penetrating

You will not find pep-rally style preaching, gospel clowns, or psychobabble in the pulpit during times of revival. You will not hear those “I’m O.K., You’re O.K.” messages when God is manifesting His power. To the contrary, the Holy Spirit makes close application to individual hearts. *For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart* (Heb 4:12). It divides between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. When the Word is quickened to the heart, it penetrates and reveals the deepest thoughts and motives. It pierces the darkness and shines light into the hidden recesses of the soul.

Searching preaching and stunning conviction are the trademarks in all awakenings. Before the top blows off, the bottom must fall out! Sin and Self are ruthlessly dealt with at the Cross. Things which were once acceptable are no longer tolerable in the light of His glory and grace. It is the subjective application of objective truth which characterizes the revival pulpit. Like one man said, “Revival is God pointing His finger right at me!”

It takes a revived man to preach *for* revival. It has been said, “If the Lord came back today, He would not cleanse the temple—He would cleanse the pulpits.” We must *break up* our fallow hearts and *break down* our pride before God will *break through* and *break in* on us.

For far too long we have contented ourselves with mediocrity. For too long we have normalized the abnormal. God was amazed when *he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor* (Isa. 59:16). Somebody must stir up himself for this generation. God is looking for men to stand in the gap. Pastor, you can “prepare the way of the Lord.” Your heart must be sensitized, sanitized, and then energized. You can set your sail to catch the wind of God when it blows.

If we want to see the fire of God in our day we must have a baptism of fire in the pulpit. Will it be business as usual, or the unusual business of revival?

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