

Why Isn't the American Church Experiencing revival?

While the church is growing at a record rate in Africa and Asia, churches are stagnating in the United States. We look at why America isn't experiencing revival.

Revival is not when the top blows off but rather when the bottom falls out." Those words were spoken to me several years ago when I asked the late Leonard Ravenhill to define revival. According to him, most religious activity in the United States does not resemble true revival. We know only a cheap imitation.

We schedule popular speakers and the best musicians and set aside a week for special meetings. We call that revival. Our meetings are set up by organizers, not agonizers.

We have reduced a move of God to a method. Yet the Bible says God is looking for a man.

John Knox, the founder of the Presbyterian Church, prayed continually, "God, give me Scotland or I die!" He said this while he was chained deep inside the hull of a French ship off the coast of his country. He prayed desperately for seven years that God would send revival to his beloved Scotland.

God works only within those who are desperate. Ravenhill also used to say, in reference to revival, that we would either "end up with prison camps or with Pentecost in the prison camps." The apostle Paul either had riots or revival, and at times both. Yet the American gospel does not seem to produce either.

A Chinese Christian recently visited the United States and toured churches here. At the end of the trip he was asked what he thought about American spirituality. He answered, "I am

amazed at how much the church in America can accomplish without the Holy Spirit.”

We have large buildings and many programs but still no move of God. We have more trained ministers and more Bible colleges than any other nation but no revival. We have seminars on revivals and huge campaigns to promote our meetings. But where is the revival?

We have spotless theology but no doxology. We have no song in our hearts. We have replaced true experience with hyperactivity. Our theologians sit in swivel chairs in ivory towers and hand out edicts to those down below.

As a church we are power-hungry and covet top positions as if we are climbing a corporate ladder. We place value on large churches with even larger programs and budgets. Those who are invited into leadership positions are the rich and the influential. We forget that spiritual authority is not given to the savvy businessman or the sports hero but to those who have carried the burden of the Lord.

Where are the brokenhearted believers who weep through the night over our spiritual bankruptcy?

A true move of God makes you utterly dependent upon Him. The touch of the Father was never designed to touch you just once. It was designed to leave you feeling helpless unless you receive the daily infilling of the Holy Spirit.

A true revival brings us to the end of ourselves. It takes us to the foot of the cross where we lay down our hopes, dreams and ambitions. History is replete with those who have given their all to see God move.

Lost Missionary Zeal

Missionaries John Paton and Adoniram Judson both served the Lord in hostile areas, and they both buried their wives and

children on the mission field. Through brokenness and humility they saw the Lord touch those who had never heard the message of redemption. When Paton first entered his field of work the locals were filled with demons. When he left, all on the island had become Christians and had renounced the practice of headhunting.

Where is the God of Elijah today? And where is this missionary passion and sacrifice? Our doctrine has changed. Today the church teaches that we are too important to the kingdom of God to lay our lives down. It claims that a good ministry must last a long time.

Neither John the Baptist nor Jesus subscribed to this egocentric American gospel. Both John and Jesus gave their lives as martyrs. Yet we have removed martyrdom from our vocabulary.

People often warn me not to take the ministry too seriously. Perhaps because I spend a lot of time preaching in war-torn nations and dangerous areas where Christians are persecuted, some believers tell me to stop being so radical. Perhaps when we express passion and fervor for the gospel, complacency is exposed.

John the Baptist said that Jesus must increase while he must decrease (see John 3:30). Yet today ministers are promoted to places of power and prominence that were unheard of in years past. Pastors have become celebrities. The halls of their palatial offices are filled with pictures of themselves.

It would seem that these ministers are increasing while Jesus is decreasing! Instead of begging God for a move of His precious Holy Spirit, we waste countless hours begging the flock to give money so the work of God will continue. What we need to do is prostrate ourselves and beg God to strip us of the power-hungry spiritual veneer that has encrusted our souls.

God is moving in powerful ways in the developing world. How is it that God can visit a mud hut in the middle of Africa yet bypass the comfortable sanctuaries we created for Him in our country?

Ravenhill answered it this way: "God does not answer prayer; He answers desperate prayer." Jesus comes to those who are desperate for Him.

The reason I believe that most of us never experience a move of God is simply that we are content to live without it. In the West we now have the money but no longer the power to speak to a paralyzed world. The song in our hearts is gone, as well as our desire for Him to rule at the center of our hearts.

We quickly point to our blessings (which are almost always of the material variety) and claim that our overabundance is due to God's favor. But isn't the ultimate sign of God's favor converted souls and a sovereign move of God?

A Chinese Christian who spent more than 26 years in a tiny prison cell was asked upon his release how he handled confinement. His answer rocked me to the core. He said it was like a honeymoon with Jesus.

Why are other nations experiencing revival and we aren't? Could it be that calamity clarifies while comfort confuses? Calamity is an excellent teacher. It shows us in an instant what is truly important.

When we become desperate, the mortgage is no longer important, nor the lawn care. When calamity strikes, it is people that are important to us, not things. While persecution purifies, prosperity often pollutes. Our materialism leaves us content without God.

The Cry of the Persecuted

I was working with persecuted Christians in Eritrea when our director there was arrested in front of our house. He was snatched and taken in the back of a truck to be interrogated because of his Christian activities. Currently more than 400 believers in Eritrea are being detained in shipping containers and holes in the ground for telling others about Jesus.

After hearing of our director's capture we gathered our team and began praying. As in the book of Acts, a miracle happened, and he was released within a few hours. But not all believers are spared like this.

While traveling through Eritrea we met a believer who had been held captive in a hole in the ground for four months. His only crime was telling others about Jesus. As he shared his testimony he washed my feet and sang a hymn in his local tongue.

The church in Eritrea has exploded in growth while its leaders have been in prison. Laypeople have taken up the call to evangelize, and nothing will stop them.

The Puritans had an old proverb that said, "Either the love of Christ will draw you to His breast or the wrath of God will drive you to His breast." What we see clearly is that God is more concerned with our holiness than our happiness. I believe God has withheld a move of His Spirit in the United States because He knows we would prostitute it and use His gifts to our own advantage. God loves us too much to allow us to be lifted up in pride.

Suffering works out a type of redemption that the West doesn't understand. To say the name of Christ in an Islamic country, where Christ is not welcome, means identifying with the cross. Jesus warned that people would hate us because we follow Him. America, when will we learn that no cross means no crown?

When I was preaching in Vietnam I asked believers who have suffered for Jesus what prayer requests we could take back to

America on their behalf. We asked if they would like us to pray for opened borders so they could evangelize without persecution. Their immediate response was that they would rather have open heavens than open borders.

The refugee camps and the restricted-access countries of the world are experiencing a refreshing move of God. Yet the paradox is that they lack the buildings, money and expertise we possess in the West. Could it be that they have discovered the true treasure of Christ's kingdom?

When I was ministering to persecuted Christians in Sudan, Sudanese helicopter gunships attacked my team and me. Several people were killed as we fled for our lives.

After escaping and hiding in the rocks, I sat with a pastor who had lost everything. His village had been attacked and his church was burned to the ground. All his possessions were lost and he, like me, had nothing but the shirt on his back.

People from his church had been killed and now he was on the run. I asked him if during his suffering he was ever tempted to doubt God's love. His reply hit me like a brick to the side of my head. "I am most aware of God's presence when I am suffering," he told me.

In the West our blessings have left us content without revival. If a man can live without revival, then he will be content without it. But when he is desperate for a touch from heaven, then God will bring brokenness—and he will no longer trust in the arm of the flesh.

More than anything today in America, we need humility. Leaders who are pompous and have an overstated importance need to humble themselves. No longer should our first question be, "How big is your church?" but rather, "What is the spiritual condition of the members?"

Christian superstars who jam the airwaves are not the answer

for a move of God. We need those who will walk in humility, cry aloud and rend their hearts so that God will receive the glory He alone is due.

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