THE Watchword

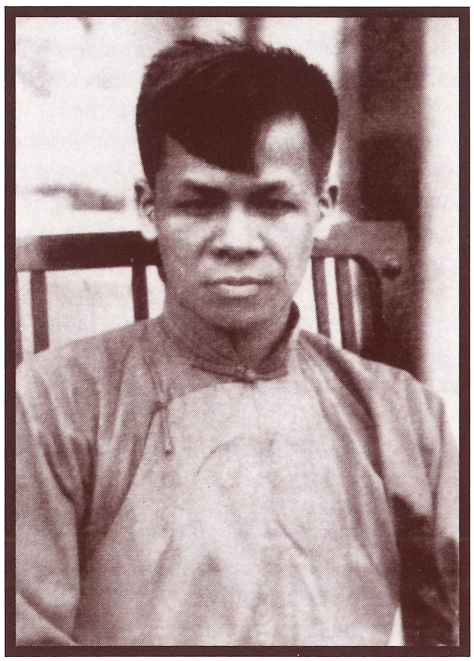
A CALL TO WATCH AND PRAY FOR REVIVAL

Col 4:2 "Devote yourself to prayer, being watchful and thankful." No. 51

PRAYER MAKES HISTORY

The modern Church, much like ancient Israel, has never been very comfortable with God's prophetic people. In every corner of the Church today you can find those who are echoing the words of stubborn King Ahab - *"Is that you, (Elijah) you TROUBLER of Israel?" (I Kings 18:17).* Usually when something tastes unpleasant to us, we try to add something to sweeten it up. Because contemporary Christendom is so uncomfortable with the prophetic voice of repentance, some are trying to redefine the role of a prophet as one who merely encourages the Church about future events. Prophets are not placed in our midst to sing us sweet lullabies, they are the alarm system for the House of God! Leonard Ravenhill described the role of a prophet this way, "*Prophets are God's emergency men for crisis hours. They thrive on perplexity, override adversity, defeat calamity, bring the new wine of the Kingdom to burst withered wineskins of orthodoxy, and birth revival."*

One of the most unique prophetic men of the Twentieth Century was the revivalist, John Sung. He operated as a true apostolic evangelist, with countless signs and wonders following his ministry. Unlike any other modern saint that I have ever studied, John Sung epitomizes that rare combination of New Testament purity and power. His life and ministry were powerfully marked by a genuine prophetic anointing. He was the embodiment of a burning zeal, unquenchable passion and an unrelenting fearlessness. Some called him the *"John Wesley of China,"* while others called him *"the Ice-Breaker"* or the *"Apostle of Revival."* Most everyone who has ever witnessed or studied his ministry, considers him to be one of the greatest revivalist of our century. Yet to our great shame and loss he has been pitifully forgotten and neglected by most of the Western Church.



John Sung

He is the forgotten prophet of the forgotten Chinese revival of 1927-1937.

John Sung was born on September 27, 1901 in Hinghwa of the Fukien province in southeast China. He was the son of a respected Methodist minister and was converted as a young boy at the age of nine. In 1920 John Sung at age nineteen left for America to study at Wesleyan University of Ohio. He later went on to study at Ohio State University and Union Theological Seminary. Within five years and two months from the day he entered college, he earned three academic degrees: a Bachelor of Science, a Master of Science and a Doctor of Philosophy, all while doing menial labor on a full time basis. However, these high honors did not come without taking a great toll on his spiritual life. After a few years in America, sitting under a steady diet of worldly philosophy and liberal theology, John Sung found himself backslidden and doubting everything that his father had taught him.

On February 10, 1927, around the same time when revival was starting to break out in China, John Sung recommitted his life to the Lord Jesus Christ. This was just the beginning of a much deeper work. After repenting of his sins he was suddenly filled with an inexpressible joy. He immediately began to preach to all his classmates and professors. This drastic change in John Sung's behavior made some believe that he had become mentally unbalanced. He soon found himself being committed to an insane asylum by the seminary authorities. He was allowed to take with him only his Bible and a fountain pen. He would later refer to that asylum as his true theological seminary. John Sung was incarcerated for 193 days, a little more than six months. During that time he read the Bible from beginning to end forty times. He devoted almost every waking hour to reading the Bible and prayer. Through those months of quiet solitude, the Holy Spirit was carefully laying the foundations for John Sung's revival ministry. He was being prepared to participate in one of the mightiest revivals of the twentieth century.

After finally being discharged, John boarded a ship on October 4, 1927 bound for Shanghai. *"He had been seven and a half years in the United States. He was now a man of outstanding scholastic attainments, and doubtless any of the national universities of China would have welcomed his services. . ."* In spite of all the possible opportunities that his education could afford him, John Sung was determined to go home and preach to his countrymen. He realized that what China needed most was not more science teachers but preachers of the gospel. One day as the ship neared its destination, he gathered up all his diplomas, medals and fraternity keys and threw them overboard into the ocean. The only exception was his doctors diploma, which he kept only for the benefit of his father. Like Paul, John Sung could say, *"What things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ" (Phil. 3: 7).*

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After arriving back in China, John Sung was soon married and then later joined the Bethel Bible School of Shanghai. It wasn't long before he became the school's field evangelist. He allied himself with Andrew Gih and a few other graduates from the school to form the *"Bethel Evangelistic Band."* God used this apostolic team mightily to spread the fires of revival all over China as they went forth preaching and singing the gospel. When John Sung was not behind the pulpit, he was reserved and even subdued. However, when preaching he was a man of fervency and intense emotions. He often would pace back and forth across the platform or sometimes leap over the Communion rail. At other times he would walk up and down the aisles to point his finger at someone in the audience and then run back to the front of the church and then stand on the Communion rail to finish his sermon.

He always emphasized repentance and the need for complete restitution where it was at all possible. He fearlessly denounced all sin and hypocrisy wherever he found it, especially among hardened ministers. Yet he also moved audiences with the message of Christ's tender and unfailing love, like few others could. Dr. Sung's meetings were always accompanied by a tremendous amount of conviction and brokenness over sin. It was not uncommon for hundreds of people to be seen with tears streaming down their faces and crying out for mercy. Convicted sinners frequently would rush forward to openly confess their sins before the whole congregation. *"In the course of his preaching, Dr. Sung often received the gift of prophecy."* On several occasions he pointed out the sins of some backslidden pastor with an incredible and fearful accuracy. Leslie T. Lyall writes, *"Sometimes he would single out an individual, a pastor or office bearer in the church, and say, 'There is sin in your heart!' And he was always right."*

When John Sung was not actively preaching or organizing a new evangelistic team, he usually could be found writing in his diary or adding to his ever growing prayer list. He carefully prayed over an extensive list of people's needs, which was accompanied by dozens of small photographs. John Sung was a faithful intercessor and always requested a small picture of those desiring prayer in order to help him intercede with a deeper burden. Everywhere he went, he urged the people to give themselves to prayer. *"The fact that the Chinese Church is a praying Church today, can be attributed in part to the influence and example of this man who prayed."* Nothing was allowed to hinder his time in prayer. John Sung made it his regular habit to be up every morning at 5 a.m. to pray for two or three hours. *"Prayer for John Sung was like a battle. He prayed until the sweat poured down his face."* At times he would literally collapse upon his bed and uncontrollably weep and sob under the burden of travailing prayer. John Sung believed that prayer was the most important work of the believer. He defined faith as watching God work while on your knees. Mr. Boon Mark said of John Sung, *"He talked least, preached more and prayed most."*

Because it was evident that John Sung was a man of great power in prayer, the sick and crippled increasingly came to him to receive prayer for their bodies. John Sung always made time to tenderly pray for their needs. *"Dr. Sung usually had one meeting in every campaign at which he would give an address on healing and the necessity for sincere repentance before inviting the sick to come forward."* Hundreds were instantly healed of every kind of ailment and disease. The blind received their sight; the lame walked, and the deaf and mute were all wonderfully healed as John Sung cried out to Jesus in prayer. Sometimes he would personally lay hands on and pray for as many as 500-600 people at one time. In spite of the fact that so many marvelous healings followed his ministry, he suffered for years from intestinal tuberculosis. This disease consistently plagued him with painful and infected bleeding ulcers in his colon. Nevertheless he still continued to fervently preach, sometimes in a kneeling position to lesson the terrible pain. Finally after years of suffering with this affliction, he died at only 43, on August 18, 1944.

John Sung was a true revival pioneer. He lead multiplied thousands of Chinese and Southeast Asians into new realms of spiritual power and reality. The call of revival, is a call to be a pioneer! If we are serious about revival, we must be willing to go places were the modern Church has never been or has long forgotten. Therefore we must stop looking to contemporary Christianity for the steps to our revival dreams and visions. We cannot afford to let the Church's present weakness and failure steal our hope and faith for a future revival. God is not calling us to imitate the weak things around us. He is inviting us to believe Him for the power and purity of the Church as seen in the New Testament! Our seventy years are finished, and it's time for us to stop listening to Sanballat and Tobiah and get busy rebuilding the House of Prayer (Dan 9:1-3, Ezra 1:1-5).

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THE **Watchword**

The purpose of this publication is to encourage prayer and preparation for a true revival of Apostolic Christianity. The enclosed material is designed to provoke hope, zeal and vision for what the Church could be if we would only fervently pray.

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

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The Watchword

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REMEMBER!

A truly prayerful and consecrated life unto God can only be established by faith. It is by trusting in the finished work of Christ that we are empowered to produce the fruit of love and righteousness.

"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world; our faith."

(I John 5:4)

Preparing The Ground For Revival

by J. Edwin Orr

"See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant" (Jer. 1:10).

Of this six-fold commission, four injunctions are destructive and only the latter two are constructive. *"To build and to plant"* surely a great work. But it had to be preceded by a rooting-out and a pulling-down, destruction and demolishing. Surely this sounds drastic! Yet it was very necessary, as the historical background shows. The Jewish kingdom had become overgrown with weeds, overbuilt with traditional superstructures. They had to go first. Some iconoclasm was necessary. Some destruction was required.

Let us look in the garden for a parable. We walked round a beautiful garden which occupied a former piece of waste land. The gardener showed us round. *"Those are beautiful roses,"* we said to him. *"I planted them,"* replied the gardener, with justified pride. *"What a beautifully-cut hedge,"* we remarked next. *"I trimmed that,"* he said. *"Who is responsible for that lovely Sweet William border?"* Again the gardener smiled and claimed the credit. We passed on, thinking to ourselves that this gardener had created a grand testimony to his skill in gardening.

At the garden gate, we found an old fellow watching a smoking heap of refuse. *"What have you been doing?" "Working at the garden,"* he said. *"Well, then, what have you to show for your labor?" "Nothing, Sir,"* he replied. *"Then you cannot have been working!"* We told him. *"Sir,"* he asserted. *"When we came here, this garden was a piece of waste land, overgrown with weeds, full of stones and sand, swampy in one corner, and pretty hopeless all round."* We got interested. *"Well sir,"* he went on, *"I broke up the land, and I destroyed the weeds, and dug out the stones, and carted away the sand, and it was my job to drain the swampy comer."* We listened with growing appreciation. *"I am saying nothing against the other fellow who planted the garden. He did his job well. But where would his planting come in if I hadn't first rooted out and destroyed the weeds?"* Both men's labor was necessary, but the rooting out and destruction of weeds preceded the planting of flowers and shrubs.

Let us remember the first work of rooting out the weeds and utterly destroying them. One of the great weaknesses of many forms of ministry today is the attempt to sow good seed among thorns. The thorns generally continue springing up, and the seed is choked thereby, despite the good intention of the human sower. Seed sown in a prepared ground requires only the action of the elements to produce fruit in season. Seed sown by the wayside, or in stony places, or among thorns, will have its prospects of life severely threatened almost immediately. Likewise, changing the mode of illustration, a Christian who is in proper relationship with God is generally hungry for the great truths and affirmations of the Gospel. A constructive message is then not only desirable, but necessary. Good food, the finest of the cream of the wheat of the Gospel of Christ, is eagerly assimilated by the Christian who lives in harmony with God.

Yet all Christians are not in proper relationship with their Lord. The present obvious dearth of revival is largely due to the fact that the majority of Christians are out of touch with the source of Divine power. Even at conventions, the first work needed is to get things put right in the lives of those attending. To give a sick stomach an overdose of cream is to risk indigestion. Even a sick stomach prefers the taste of cream to the flavor of the bitter medicine. Still the bitter medicine is necessary, and it does not prevent the enjoying and digesting of good food afterwards-rather it creates the actual appetite of good health, which is quite distinct from the false cravings of indigestion.

For instance, the glorious message of the position of every believer in Christ is a comfort to many souls. Yet it cannot bring much blessing to a stubborn Christian living in disobedience and conscious sin. He needs to act on the teaching of repentance and confession and cleansing FIRST, and then he may comfort himself with other truths. I heard once of a church which had the cream of doctrine given within its walls, week in, week out. Judging from the quality of uplifting ministry given there, one would have expected to find the church members on the highest heavenly plane. But in this instance, they had a church quarrel which resulted in the bread and wine being spilled in a scuffle, and the police were called in to restore order. They obviously needed more than cream. Medicine was wanted badly. Positional truth cannot be profitably taught until conditional teaching has had its effect. Cast no pearls before swine. So great is this problem, that when the preacher strikes out against sin among believers and urges purity of life, critics cry *"Introspection,"* and some insist that he is trying to divert the eyes of the people away from Christ towards self and shortcomings.

It was my happy experience once, to speak at a great convention well-known in England. It was arranged with the council members that if blessing came through in the degree hoped for, I would be at liberty to continue for double the time. Beginning with destructive ministry, the Lord used His word to create deep conviction of heart. The place was thronged. Christians were stirred to confession and repentance, and many souls were saved.

By contrast, I was speaking at another convention, not so far away. It was a convention of good standing. I felt led to speak first of the shortcoming of believers and the need of getting right before enjoying the good things of the feast. The next speakers seemed to doubt the worth of such a method, and their message seemed to be: *"You are complete in Christ, so don't worry about these trifles. God accepts you in the Beloved, and you needn't mind."* For days there was that cross-current of message. I believed with all my heart in the truth of their message, but I thought that the time was unripe for its application.

With a burdened heart, I prayed for clear guidance regarding continuing my message. The Lord put a text, a *"new"* text for me, into my heart, and I preached it. Before I preached it, a speaker dwelt on the glorious promises of God, promises meant for obedient children. Then followed my opportunity. *"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1).* It gave the connection at last, but we had no great revival. It drove home many truths to me. Let us comfort one another with the grand truths of our position in Christ. But let us not make excuse by saying that our "*completeness*" in Him permits us to wink at known sin.

The Church Must First Repent
by J. Edwin Orr

The WOMB of REVIVAL

"WHOM DOES GOD USE TO BIRTH REVIVAL?"

by David Smithers

Is a genuine widespread revival really coming? Some claim that the Church is already enjoying a mighty end-time revival. Others argue that the Church doesn't even need revival, only better Bible teaching or political reform. What does true revival really look like? These kinds of questions and many others are increasingly being debated within the Church today. Even some of our noted Church leaders seem quite confused when trying to define the realities of revival. Like many others, I strongly believe that a genuine revival is coming. Yet with all this debate and growing confusion, I can't help but question how prepared the Church at large is for such a visitation. I am very aware that there will always be those who will oppose the move of the Spirit, but how can we as the Church prepare and pray for a revival that we can't even agree about? Our call for revival must be clear and well defined if the people of God are to correctly respond in faith and fervent prayer. It is my hope that the following material will eliminate some of the present confusion over revival and thus help many of us to be better prepared for what still awaits us.

In spite of all this confusion, many within the Church are still very HUNGRY for a supernatural move of God. Nevertheless, hunger alone is never a sure guarantee for future blessing. Our hunger for revival must be directed by the Holy Spirit, according to God's biblical principles. Intense spiritual hunger, though invaluable and a much needed quality, has its occasional draw backs. There is such a thing as a kind of spiritual malnutrition that makes a believer less discriminate and careful about what he consumes. We must be aware of this and take care that our desperate hunger for revival doesn't diminish our spiritual vision and discernment. I believe that many today have wanted revival so badly that they are now being tempted to settle for a mixed or incomplete work of the Spirit. *"To the hungry even what is bitter tastes sweet" (Prov 27:7 & Luke 15:15-17).* Misguided spiritual hunger, if left unchecked, will ultimately leave us unprepared and disqualified for the revival that is still yet to come! This is a critical time in the Church, and we can not afford to become prematurely satisfied with spiritual foothills, while the mountain peaks of GLORY still await us! We must give ourselves no rest, until we see the complete fulfillment of all of God's revival purposes and promises for our generation.

Are we Looking for Revival in the Wrong Places?

The question is no longer if revival will come, but rather through whom will revival come? Not only is it necessary for us to discern the seasons of revival, we must also learn how to discern God's appointed servants of revival. What kind of people does God use to bring a genuine move of the Spirit? Some would lead us to believe that revivals come somewhat randomly through anyone who happens to be available. Don't you believe it. God is not going to haphazardly entrust the next move of the Holy Spirit to a bunch of careless and uncooperative people! The conditions and principles of revival don't just conveniently change for the whims and preferences of each new generation. God brings revival only through those who humbly cooperate with His eternal values. If we want to be prepared for the coming revival, we must learn how to cooperate with God on His terms.

God's revivalists are not selected on the basis of beauty and ability, but rather brokenness and humility!

Absalom, the son of King David, was once presumed to be God's chosen vessel simply because he was attractive and charming. However, like a beautiful flower, he soon faded away and proved not to be what he first appeared (2 Sam. 14:25, James 1:9-11). God's revivalists are not selected on the basis of beauty and ability, but rather brokenness and humility! The Father has always preferred the humble for His revival purposes. Rarely have God's revivalists been found among the polished and esteemed churchmen of their day. Therefore, it would be a serious mistake for us to expect to find the next move of God on some glamorous stage bathed in glitter and bright lights. The birthplace of revival is usually discovered in despised and lowly mangers, not elegant mansions!

Nevertheless, many Christians still refuse to accept this vital spiritual lesson. Like the religious leaders in Jesus time, they presume to find the glory of God carried by a beautiful white stallion, not a homely little donkey! (Matt. 21:5). Most of Israel missed the day of their visitation merely because they were looking for the promised visitation of God in the wrong places. While they were busy searching for some regal king or political savior, Jesus was walking among them as a common carpenter (Isa. 53:2). God's revival methods have never changed, it still pleases Him to come through humble and lowly servants. How many of us are in danger of missing the day of our own visitation, simply because we are still thinking like mere carnal men? If we like it or not God prefers the company of broken and lowly people. God is no respecter of persons, but He is definitely a respecter of CHILDLIKE FAITH and HUMILITY (Acts 10:34). As the old Puritan, Robert Leighton, once said, *"God's choice acquaintances are humble men."*

Where Can We Expect to Find Revival?

When the Father first chose Israel out of all the nations of the world, it was not because Israel was superior in size and strength, but because they were weak and small (Deut. 7:6-7). The Father promises revival not to the strong and self-reliant but to the HUMBLE! *"I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa. 57:15).* God is looking for a people who are lowly and broken. The scriptures are quite clear about this. *"For the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). "For that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15).*

Again in 1Cor. 1:27-29, Paul plainly tells us where we should look to find God's chosen instruments of revival: *"But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him."* The most powerful revivals throughout the history of the Church have always been nurtured by obscure and unlikely people. The kingdom of God has the greatest impact when carried in the hands of the HUMBLE.

Mary & God's Revival Grace

The Bible is full of examples of God giving abundant grace to the humble for His revival purposes. Yet the most striking example of them all is found in the gospel account of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary typifies the kind of hidden and obscure people that God delights to use in bringing revival. God, in His perfect wisdom, chose an unknown virgin to be the channel for His ultimate visitation.

Though this was very difficult for Mary to comprehend at first, she soon grasped the wisdom of God's decision. She boldly testifies to this fact in Luke 1:46-53: *"And Mary said: 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has regarded the LOWLY and HUMBLE state of His bondslave. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the mighty One has done great things for me, holy is His name. His mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who with CONTEMPT and PRIDE hold themselves above others in the intellectual insight and moral understanding of their heart. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones but has lifted up the HUMBLE. He has FILLED and SATISFIED the HUNGRY with good things but has sent the RICH away EMPTY-HANDED without a gift."* The strong and self-reliant are disqualified as the candidates for true revival. They are full of their own success, talents and intelligence. They are quite confident that they can handle whatever comes their way. Therefore they are sent away empty and dry because there is no vacuum within their lives for the glory of Jesus to fill.

Obscurity & Revival

Lowly and humble people don't usually come from prestigious places. Mary was certainly no exception. Luke 1:26 reveals that Mary lived on the wrong side of the tracks in the infamous city of Nazareth of Galilee. This city had a terrible reputation for being one of the most irreligious places in all of Israel. It was considered to be a ghetto or slum among most Israelites. Thus the saying: *"Can anything good come out of Nazareth" (John 1:46).* This expression seems to accurately reflect the general attitude that most people had about Nazareth at this time. Nazareth was the last place you would expect to find one of God's special instruments of revival.

Jesus is the Focus of True Revival

You may still be asking, *"How was Mary an instrument of revival and awakening?" "What did she do to help bring revival?"* Matthew 1:23 reads, *"Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us."* What is true revival, but God being manifest with us. Through Mary's humble cooperation, Christ came down and personally dwelt among us (John 1:14). She nurtured within her own womb the tangible presence of Jesus, until the appointed time of His delivery. Mary pushed and travailed until Jesus Christ broke forth into a lost and dying world. Heaven came down to earth through her obscure and humble life. Likewise, Jesus longs to manifest Himself today through some humble remnant of His virgin Bride and Church.

The coming river of God is waiting to be set into motion by our tears of brokenness and repentance!

Revival is not just a series of good church meetings or a successful evangelistic crusade. Nor is revival merely some inanimate spiritual force or experience. True revival is much more than just a means by which Christians get their spiritual needs met. Revival is not an IT; revival is a visitation of HIM. Consequently, Christians quickly forsake their sins and realign their lives with heaven. Soon their hearts begin to burn and ache for the salvation of all men everywhere, that they too might know the joy of worshiping and obeying Jesus Christ. In true revival, Jesus Christ and His worship is the beginning and the end of everything that happens. James A. Stewart wrote, *"The chief characteristic of true revival is that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself is the center of the attraction: 'It was heard that He was in the house and immediately many gathered together. . .'" (Mark 2:1,2).*

Holiness & Revival

In Luke 1:27 we can learn something else from Mary about the character of God's revival instruments. In this verse, Mary is identified first and foremost as a chaste and pure virgin. As far as the

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scripture is concerned, this was her most defining characteristic. In faith, she had reserved her heart and body exclusively for the love and affections of her coming bridegroom. She was not available for common or worldly use. She refused to allow herself to be touched or handled by the enticements of this world. Mary was a *"fragrant garden enclosed, a spring shut up and a fountain sealed" (SOS 4:12).*

Likewise the Church is also called to be a chaste virgin, betrothed and reserved for her Husband, Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:25-32 & 2 Cor 11:2). If we truly want to be used in the coming revival, we too must surrender to a deep work of consecration and holiness. God will not bring revival through a proud and unrepentant people (2 Chronicles 7:14). Faith-filled repentance and humility are always the nursemaid and cradle for every young and growing move of the Holy Spirit. The coming river of God is waiting to be set into motion by our tears of brokenness and repentance! By FAITH in Christ, we can be prepared and purified for God's coming visitation.

Because Mary had reserved herself in holiness and purity, she was rewarded with some very special privileges. Have you ever considered that it was Mary who first touched the precious face of our Lord Jesus? She was the first to embrace Him, and it was she who first looked into His gentle yet searching eyes. Mary was the very first one to intimately embrace the tangible presence of God. She was truly blessed above all other women. The promises of God are true: *"Blessed are the pure in heart: FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD" (Matt. 5:8).*

God's Methods for Revival

In Luke 1:34 we find another lesson on revival. Here Mary asks the angel Gabriel, *"How can these things be, since I do not know a man?"* How can an inexperienced young girl bring forth the visitation of God without the help of man? To the natural mind, such things seem completely impossible. Nevertheless, Zech. 4:6 reminds us that the works of God are not born by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit. True revival is not the product of human planning and creative fund raising. Revival is never dependent upon our temporal holdings and material assets. The only assets the Church of Acts had on the day of Pentecost was a 120 humble intercessors. Still, there are those who claim that if they just had enough money and manpower, they could revive America and save the world. All such boasting is complete nonsense!

For too long the Church has been victimized by ambitious men who cut corners by leaning on the arm of the flesh. No amount of promotion and clever scheming will ever make God's Kingdom come to earth. E. M. Bounds plainly states it this way, *"It is much easier to engineer a great religious movement by human forces than it is to break our hearts and humble ourselves in the dust before God."* In Luke 1:35 Gabriel answers Mary's question in the following way, *"And the angel answered and said unto her, 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee.'"* In other words, stop looking to MAN and start seeking God alone as your Provider and strength. Revival power is born of the Spirit through faith and humility, not by the power of fleshly methods. Are we planning and pleading with fickle men, when we should be fervently praying to a faithful God?

The Reproach of Revival

In Luke 1:38 we observe Mary's final response to the Lord's revival commission. Though shaken by Gabriel's remarkable message, Mary confidently replies, *"Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be done unto me according to your word."* With those simple faith-filled words, Mary surrendered complete control of her life and reputation to the sovereign Spirit of revival. She accepted all the potential risks and consequences that so often come with believing and obeying the promises of God.

Are we planning and pleading with fickle men, when we should be fervently praying to a faithful God?

Because Mary chose to do things God's way instead of man's way, she no doubt suffered severe reproach and rejection from her family and neighbors. She willingly bore the shame and misunderstanding of becoming mysteriously pregnant before her marriage. For Jesus' sake she was willing to sacrifice her family, friends and reputation. If we choose to participate with God's ordained revival process, we too will be painfully misunderstood and cut-off by some within the religious community. Church history teaches us that with the seeds of revival come the fiery darts of slander and false accusations. Revival participants have always had to be willing to be misunderstood and accused of being unorthodox and illegitimate. Carnal men cannot understand or appreciate the things of the Spirit. Therefore, it should not surprise us to find God's revival instruments surrounded by ridicule and bitter controversy (Rom. 8:7 & 1 Cor. 2:14).

God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility in Revival

What other effects did this birthing process have upon Mary's life? Was she an active participant in the process or merely the idle pawn of God? Mary's pregnancy beautifully illustrates for us something of the mysterious union between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility in revival. God the Holy Spirit miraculously placed the seed of Christ within Mary's womb, independent of any outside influence or help. Mary did not seek or initiate this incredible miracle, nor could she have even dreamed of it. It was totally a sovereign act of God. God alone exercised the power to open Mary's virgin womb.

However, after that supernatural conception, it was Mary who then had to make a conscious choice to participate with the pregnancy and birth. Mary's involvement with God's prophetic plan

was not the actions of some mindless machine, but the willing expression of love and humble submission. Norman Grubb explains this principle in the following way, *"Revival is not an act of divine sovereignty apart from human cooperation, but the legitimate outcome of man's compliance with divine conditions for revival."* Duncan Campbell of the Hebrides Revival wrote something similar, *"We do not believe in any conception of sovereignty that nullifies my responsibility... We are the human agents through which revival is possible."* When Mary surrendered to God's calling on her life, she knew that it would mean sleepless nights and months of discomfort and pain. Yet she willingly chose to be stretched and burdened, as the life of God grew within her.

The Birth Pains of Revival

Mary not only had to learn how to patiently endure a long and painful pregnancy, but also the tears and travail of child birth. Natural births are either helped or hindered by the actions of the expectant mother. It all depends upon the mother's willingness to push and travail, as each pain or wave of contractions comes upon her. The timing of these pains is not something that the mother can control or postpone for a more convenient time. If the baby is to be delivered quickly and safely, she MUST push with each birth pain as it comes.

As the Bride of Jesus Christ, we are called to participate with the birth pains of revival. We all love to recall the thrilling stories of past revival power and glory, but are we willing to labor and push in our pursuit of revival? Are we willing to give ourselves to sleepless nights of fasting and travailing prayer? There is no such thing as giving birth without travail and violent pushing. *"The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matt. 11:12).* Fervent prayers and rivers of tears are always the forerunners of genuine revival. Remember, the prayer room is God's delivery room for revival. If we are neglecting prayer, we are neglecting revival, regardless of how many famous renewal meetings we may have attended!

There will be no mighty visitation of God without the travail and fervent prayers of the Church. As Brother Ravenhill use to say, *"We need a revival of weeping to precede a revival of reaping!"* Are you willing to weep and travail until a heaven sent harvest comes? When God's house is once again filled with the bitter-sweet tears of travail, then we can know with certainty that revival is truly imminent. *"For as soon as Zion TRAVAILED, she brought forth her children" (Isaiah 66:8).*

The Birthplace of Revival

It was at Bethlehem that Mary first realized that she was going into labor. Evening was fast approaching, and Joseph had to quickly find an appropriate place for Mary to give birth. He was turned away at one inn after another, as Mary's birth pains grew stronger and closer together. *Luke 2:6-7 says, "The time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in swaddling cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."* Remember, there was nothing extraordinary about Joseph and Mary to warrant them any special consideration from Bethlehem's inn keepers. They were just humble and unassuming strangers without wealth or influence.

They were finally forced to bed down in a damp and musty cave or stable where the livestock were fed. It was here that Mary was hidden away to bravely push and travail until the presence of Jesus broke forth into the world. Have you ever noticed how most babies seem to be born in the middle of the night? This was the case with Mary. While others were comfortably sleeping, she was pushing and crying out in pain in obedience to her God! The final fruits of revival shine brightly, while the pains of travailing prayer usually go unnoticed in obscure and hidden places. In John 16:21, Jesus Himself said, *"A woman when she is in travail has sorrow, because her hour is come; but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembers no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world."* There are many who want the joy of revival without the sorrow of travail. God's chosen revival instruments have always embraced both.

Who are the First to Witness Revival?

Who was the FIRST to hear of this glorious visitation? Was it the high priest, the king or some other prominent person? Luke 2:8-11 tells us that it was the lowly shepherds: *"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.'"* Like Joseph and Mary, these shepherds were humble and lowly people. This is why they were the first to be chosen to witness the birth and visitation of God. Contrary to our modern nativity scenes, the wise men from the east did not visit the manger that first night with the humble shepherds. They found Jesus much later in a house (Matt. 2:1-11).

When God's house is once again filled with the tears of travail, then we can know with certainty that revival is truly imminent.

The shepherds had been given a specific sign to help them know exactly where to find the presence of God. Luke 2:12 reads, *"This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."* Being local shepherds, they were very familiar with all of the nearby stables and knew right where to look. Others might have been offended and stumbled by such a sign, but to these humble men this was a word of welcome and encouragement to their hungry hearts. The scriptures say that, *"They made haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger."* They had found the promised Glory of God, not in some beautiful temple but resting in a despised and lowly manger in the form of a helpless child. This is still God's sign for us today who are looking for the birthplace of true revival.

Revival History is the History of Humility & Brokenness

All the great revivals of the past have been birthed in much the same way. The First Great Awakening was powerfully birthed in the open fields of England, as Whitefield and Wesley preached to the lowly coal miners. The Second Great Awakening started in a simple country church and went on to have its most powerful effects among the common frontier people who gathered in the woods of Kentucky. Of the Third Great Awakening, J. Edwin Orr wrote, *"It was no man's monument."* This Awakening could not be traced to the influence of any one particular evangelist or organization. The revival was miraculously born in the hungry hearts of thousands of humble and praying people.

The Welsh revival of 1904 began in a small young people's meeting, under the direction of an unknown and half-educated twenty-six year old coal miner named Evan Roberts. The Azusa Street revival was born in a simple cottage prayer meeting. As the revival grew, the meetings were moved to an old run down church building that had once served as a livery stable. The revival flourished from 1906-1909 under William J. Seymour, a humble one-eyed black preacher from Texas. The history of revival will forever be associated with extended seasons of deep brokenness and humility.

Are You Willing to Become Pregnant with Revival?

As I said before, the question is no longer if revival will come, but rather through whom will revival come? Where are the humble and broken people who will allow God to birth a mighty visitation through them? Where are the ones who are willing to empty themselves of their own agendas and plans in order to become pregnant with God's vision for revival? Will YOU allow Jesus to break you and use you in the coming revival? Invite the Holy Spirit even now to fill you with that kind of all-consuming vision and calling. Yield to the Spirit and give Him permission to ache, weep and pray through you! Humble yourself and repent of ANYTHING that would hinder or quench the Spirit of revival! Ask the Lord to let you feel what He feels about the state of the Church and the world. This is the season and time for us to fast, weep and pray for a true visitation of God. In fact, it could be our last opportunity to cooperate with God's revival purposes. Most believers never get more than one chance in a lifetime to be involved in a true move of God. Will you humble yourself and pray, or must the Lord look elsewhere to find a willing and humble virgin? *"Ask the LORD for rain in the time of the latter rain" (Zech 10:1).*

THE Watchword

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