

PURSUING AND PREACHING FOR PERSONAL RENEWAL

Liz Miller

LIZ MILLER EXPLORES HOW WE NEED TO PURSUE PERSONAL RENEWAL OURSELVES BEFORE WE CAN PREACH IT. THIS IS AN ADAPTED VERSION OF HER PRESENTATION WITHIN THE MET DIGGING FOR TREASURE CONFERENCE: PREACHING FOR REVIVAL AND RENEWAL, SEPTEMBER 2023.

We need revival!

Congregations across our country are mostly made up of God's people who need to be awakened to a greater love and commitment to Jesus Christ. There are others who might consider themselves Christians, but need to hear and respond to a message by which they may come to a living faith in Jesus. It's not up to us to call revival into being; it is all a work of God. We need to be ready ourselves for revival so we can help our congregations to be ready for when God sends revival. We need disciples who are ready to disciple others when revival has a wider effect on society. We live in challenging times, and if we are not careful, we can end up preaching

from a dry and dusty land. A place where we no longer feel at home; a place where we feel betrayed; maybe we feel this is not what we signed up for but it remains where God has called us to be and to preach his Good News. As Paul wrote to the church in Rome, we must 'not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will' (Romans 12:2). We must ever recover our love for God and as we do so, we must challenge our hearers to understand and love God more deeply.

Smith Wigglesworth said: 'Live ready. If you have to get ready when the opportunity comes your way, you'll be too late. Opportunity doesn't wait, not even while you pray. You must not have to get ready, you must live ready at all times.' As we wait for revival we can undertake various practices to renew our minds to help us live ready. We need to do and think things intentionally until they become natural to us, so that they become part of us. Are we with Paul for whom, 'to live is Christ and to die is gain' (Philippians 1:21)? For the present

time though, do we love to read and meditate on the Word of God and is our personal time with God consistent and meaningful? Is it a time when we can take in God's Word and prayerfully apply its truth to our everyday lives? It's not easy, but through the study of God's Word, we need to allow the Holy Spirit to fill and control us each day as we allow Jesus to be Lord of every area of our lives.

To those living in a culture not so different from our own, Paul warned: 'But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving' (Ephesians 5:3-4). This is a challenge to us who have so many entertainments available that could draw our focus from God. We are urged to resist, confess and forsake sin as God convicts. We need to ask ourselves whether we value highly the things that please God? Jesus calls us to 'seek first his kingdom and his righteousness'. Do our diary and bank statements reflect this? We must ask Jesus to challenge

or affirm us in our choices. The more time we spend with God's Word to strengthen our personal walk with him the more will be our understanding of his will for us and for the community around us: that Jesus is all in all, our only Lord and Saviour, the hope of the world.

God is in the transformation business. As preachers, we should be anticipating that through the Spirit's power, what we say will bring some new insight or change of attitude or behaviour in our listeners and we should not be surprised if the same challenges strike us! Preachers engage in spiritual battle for the hearts and minds of their hearers, using the one offensive weapon given them: 'the Word of God' (Ephesians 6:17). This is why it is so important that we preach scripture; take scripture seriously and if any have issue with what we say, we should have confidence that we are just messengers!

We do spiritual battle from a place of humility; where we admit to others when we are wrong, rejoice when others are praised and recognised and we may often find ourselves in a place where our accomplishments go unnoticed. We must examine our motives. In an early clash with the religious authorities 'Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than humans"' (Acts 5:29). So, we need to be more concerned with what God thinks than what others think. Would we pray, read our Bibles, give, and serve as much if nobody but God ever noticed? Furthermore, how is our own life of obedience, both to God and the human authorities that have been placed over our lives?

Preaching in our own church can be difficult. How embarrassing to speak about forgiveness, say, when one of the listeners is someone you have either wronged or you need to forgive. Keep short accounts with one another. Be faithful in praying for the needs of others. Paul challenged Timothy, 'that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people' (1 Timothy 2:1). Also, how specific, fervent and faithful are we in praying for revival? During preparation we must pray for our congregation, for our musicians and anyone else who

might be involved in the leading of God's people in worship. Pray that the message God gives us will be received where needed. When you are preparing to attend worship - as a member of the congregation - pray for the preacher that he or she will be inspired by God and renewed through preparation. Keep upholding the preacher before God that God will use them and protect them.

As preachers, in our preparation, ask God to reveal how through the scriptures we can bring the glory of God to the congregation - a glory that will lead to repentance, confirmation and assurance that all times and all seasons are in his hands as we faithfully wait on him, ready to do his will.

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