

Articles and Sermons :: Sleeping Church by Leonard Ravenhill

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Solemnly and slowly, with his index finger extended, Napoleon Bonaparte outlined a great stretch of country on a map of the world. "There," he growled, "is a sleeping giant. Let him sleep! If he wakes, he will shake the world." That sleeping giant was China. Today, Bonaparte's prophecy of some one hundred and fifty years ago makes sense.

Today Lucifer is probably surveying the church just as Bonaparte did China. One can almost behold the fear in his eyes as he thinks of the Church's unmeasured potential and growls, "Let the Church sleep! If she wakes, she will shake the world." Is not the Church the sleeping giant of today?

Some years ago the newspaper headlines carried the story of a young Chinese student who "flunked" his exams here in America. So humiliated was he and so withered by anticipated scorn that for three years the youth hid in the belfry of a church and became skin and bones. Because of his shame, he froze in winter and blistered in summer under that church's thin roof. As today's Church of Jesus Christ thinks about the day of reckoning that is surely coming, oh that a holy fear would come upon her (even if it drives her to extremes) in order to arouse her from her present paralysis!

Consider Samson's fall. He didn't get drunk; he didn't commit murder; he didn't steal. Samson fell simply because he succumbed to the natural, and fell asleep.

That one small act put him into captivity,

made a false god popular,

and scattered the forces of the true and living God.

If even yet you feel a hangover of the old interpretation that the Samson of the Bible is a distant relative of Hercules or Atlas (famed in mythology for carrying the world on his back), then think again. Samson was no human monstrosity. He was no super-edition of a Goliath. If Samson had been a colossus, then why did Delilah ask the question, "Wherein lieth thy great strength?"

Let the final word be from the Word of God itself, for in telling the story of men mighty in faith, the writer to the Hebrews says: Time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson,... who through faith ... stopped the mouths of lions" (Heb. 11:32-33). Only two men in Scripture stopped the mouths of lions--Daniel and Samson. But no giant could sing le-handedly, as Samson, "put to flight the armies of the aliens," or toy with opposing armies.

Here, Samson slays a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass;

there, he kills another thirty men.

Here, he takes the gates of Gaza for a ride:

there, he tears a lion like paper.

To add insult to injury, the Spirit's comment is "he had nothing in his hand."

Note well, yea, read for yourself the whole story of the secret of this mighty exploiter, this more-than-conquering believer : "The Spirit of the Lord rested mightily upon him." Everything in the story adds up to this staggering fact: Supernatural power was upon Samson.

Now turn back ten chapters in this wonder book of Judges and have a little peep into the life of Gideon. Surely as a boy, Gideon had heard from his father the hair-raising stories of a mighty Deity. In Judges 6, Gideon is older, and while thres

hing corn, is fearing an attack of the Midianites. For seven years, the once liberated slaves of Pharaoh had again become captives. Dens and caves were their homes. No longer were they able to sing the Lord's song.

It must have sounded like a fairy tale when that angel appeared to Gideon and informed him, "God is with thee, thou mighty man of valor." Yet he shot back the answer, "If God be with us, where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of?" This answer makes clear that Gideon was expecting some supernatural evidence. To him, the seal of the Lord's presence would be something that could not be rationalized.

Alas that today there is more evidence of religious sensation before our eyes than evidence of spiritual regeneration and supernatural phenomenon! Not many Christians today can forget the fact that the devil goeth about as a roaring lion, but we seem to have lost sight of the fact that the Lion of the tribe of Judah has defeated the roaring lion of hell, and therefore every anointed Samson or Gideon or church can also slay the lion of hell. Though wicked men are doing wickedly, God's promise to us is that "the people that do know their God shall be strong and do exploits" (Daniel 11:32).

This much is sure:

If we could merit revival by fasting, there would be many martyred by starving.

If we could organize revival, we would pool our thinking to outwit the powers of darkness.

If we could buy this elusive revival with the mammon of unrighteousness, we could get a score of what we call Christian millionaires to underwrite the thing for us.

If we could blast the devil from this present world, we would pledge the politicians for an atom bomb.

God pity us that after years of writing, using mountains of paper and rivers of ink, exhausting flashy terminology about the biggest revival meetings in history, we are still faced with gross corruption in every nation, as well as with the most prayerless church age since Pentecost.

This is a plea for the return of the supernatural; but I must also give this a word of explanation. For a decade, all over this land there has been a ministry of the miraculous (more or less), and thank God for all who honor Him and remain faithful. But having said that, here is a plea for sane thinking and a spiritual evaluation of the evangelistic field. To a large degree, have we not substituted seeing for hearing? In Acts, Philip the evangelist could have transferred the Ethiopian eunuch to a city seething with revival fever where the eunuch could have seen "the lame leap like an hart and the tongue of the dumb sing." Instead, he pitched right into the Word of the living God, and beginning at the same Scripture preached unto him Jesus. We need the miraculous but we also need Christ-centered teaching. Our crucified, exalted Christ must have preeminence over all other slants of truth, for while the Church is languishing, the world is perishing. "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord..." (Isaiah 51:9)

Again let me say, Samson's size was not the secret of his strength. The fact that he was the same size after he backslid negates the idea that he was a giant. His only external peculiarity was his long locks, uncut because he was a Nazarite. Nor had his long hair in itself any abnormal power. Samson's secret was obedience. As long as Samson trod the straight and narrow path of obedience, he was invincible.

Let us remember, too, that Samson, who began in the Spirit, fell into the flesh, and so had a prison term to bring him to his senses. Finally, by one last mighty miracle, he finished in the Spirit. Backslider, this is a word for your recovery, for God can restore the years that the cankerworm and the caterpillar have eaten. He who is able delights in mercy.

Samson's final act of power was the crowning achievement of a spectacular life's work. After he had slipped out from under the harness of obedience, he was forced into separation from the world in a prison. Once an army trembled at his every sight; later a single boy came to lead the blinded Samson into the temple of Dagon, the fish-god. How the mighty had fallen! Yet now, God took this "weak thing" into a temple full of lords of the Philistines and set him between the pillars. "Samson took hold of the pillars ... the one with his right hand and the other with his left ... and he bowed himself with all his might" (Judges 16:29-30). Holy jealousy gripped him. Mighty as he had been in other things, Samson now proved mightiest in prayer: "Lord, strengthen me ... this once!" (vs. 28). Would to God that every professed believer in the whole of Christendom would borrow this prayer and mean it. Then with dramatic conclusion, Samson sealed the doom of many more of the enemies of God in his dying than in his living.

Is this the dying hour of this dispensation? Many say it is. Some Christians have already hung their harps on the willows, and yet others seem to delight in speaking of the Church's present lapse as a proof of divine inspiration. But I myself believe that if the Church will only obey the conditions, she can have a revival any time she wants it. The problem of the Church is the problem in the garden of Gethsemane-sleep! For while men sleep, the enemy, sows his seed through his cults. Lest men sleep the sleep of eternal death, Oh arm of the Lord, Oh Church of the living God, awake!

If the church is going to attain to her potential in this last hour, it is apparent that we are going to have to dust off an old word that many of us have forgotten is in the English language -- DISCIPLINE! To some, this word discipline will have a monastic flavor, for it smells of the Middle Ages or throws onto the screen of the mind a picture of an unwashed hermit or a hollow-eyed anchorite. Be not deceived. Every smart "top brass" military expert has arrived there because he wore the harness of discipline. Leonard Bernstein in his music-talks holds his baton like a magic wand over mesmerized millions because of discipline. This brings to mind the words of the poet:

The heights by great men reached and kept were not attained by sudden flight,

But they, while their companions slept, were toiling upward through the night!

If any man wants to write a bestseller, let him attempt a book on How to be a Saint in Six Easy Lessons. Such a writer would be fishing with bait that this generation of believers wants; but I, for one, would not swallow it.

In a brilliant sermon called "Discipleship," G. Cambell Morgan says, "Jesus Christ could speak to the sorrow-burdened heart of humanity words so full of mother-love and father-love as to make men crowd and press round Him. On the other hand, He could suddenly speak words that flashed and scorched and burned until men drew back in astonishment." Bracketed in the last group would be these two commands: "Take my yoke upon you" and "My disciple, take up your cross and follow me." Both of these words imply discipline.

When we sing in a sunlit church "Oh to be like Thee; Oh to be like Thee," we get weepy and feel an emotional lift. But permit this simple challenge:

Do we really mean 'Oh to be like Thee' -- like the Christ of God, who was a man of discipline?

Do we really mean 'Oh to be like Thee' -- fasting alone in the desert?

Do we mean 'Oh to be like Thee' to touch the depths of prayer that make us cry, 'All Thy billows are gone over me.'

Do we mean 'Oh to be like Thee' -- to become habituates of the fastness of the prayer chamber?

Do we mean 'Oh to be like Thee' -- in a will like His, for He said,

"I always do the will of my Father." Is that not discipline?

The religious sentimentalist who sings "Just a closer walk with Thee" but walks close to the ungodly and sits with the blasphemers, is not taken seriously in either heaven or hell. Be very sure, friend, that this vile world is not "a friend to grace to help on to God." We need to pray the Father to put some blood into this "water" that runs through our veins. Our Simon-like natures need the Upper Room fire to clean us out and the discipline of the Spirit to shape us into soldiers.

Twenty-five years of discipline in a crow's nest of an office up behind his church in Chicago brought about a Dr. A. W. Tozer, who produced a book, The Pursuit of God. This in turn produced on the ocean of spiritual teaching waves that lap their way to the ends of the earth.

After I spoke at a session in the Bible School of Wales, Mrs. Rees Howells called me for a private talk. We stood on the veranda of her home overlooking beautiful Swansea Bay I can see her finger upheld as she said, "Many talk of my husband's buying this place with a shilling (fourteen cents) in his pocket. What they forget is that he prayed twelve hours a day for eleven months to know the mind of God." Brethren, that's discipline!

Today, immediately when one gets out of step with a nearby Christian, he is considered a legalist. Just remember, in "that great day of Judgment" when we must stand before His throne, no man will be ashamed he was dubbed over-spiritual, though many will weep, groan, and "suffer loss" because of lack of discipline. Discipline is a harness by which we en-

able the Spirit to get the best out of our frail humanity. The Apostle Paul was a disciplinarian like his Master:

He disciplined his body: "I keep my body under."

He disciplined himself to loneliness: "All men forsook me."

He disciplined himself to scorn: "We are fools for Christ's sake."

He disciplined himself to poverty: "We suffered need."

He disciplined himself to rejection: "We are despised."

He disciplined himself to death: "I die daily."

He disciplined himself to suffering: "Persecuted, but not forsaken."

May this be our prayer, "Oh Lord, I bow my neck to Thy yoke!"

Since the hour Adam first rose to his feet, man has not stood, as today, between such potential and such peril. America is still the richest nation in the world. It is a mighty crucible into which refugees of almost all modern nations are poured. It has far more Bible schools than any other nation. In these Bible schools is dedicated manpower. Here, too, is wealth to get this manpower to the ends of the earth, and here is linguistic ability unmatched in the annals of time.

Even the gathering at Pentecost had not the potential, humanly speaking, that this vast nation has. Do you wonder, then, that from every angle, hell has America under cross fire? This mighty land is cursed with blessings. I fear that unless she awakens, repents, and puts on the whole armor, of God, she will be blessed with cursings. Already other nations are in the slavery of oppression. Can America and Britain long remain free? Unless we are to have the war of wars that will usher us into the night of nights and the judgment of judgments, we must have the revival of revivals. Pale, pathetic, palliating preaching must be driven from the church like the idols it promotes. It is time for the church to cry again, "Where is the God of Elijah?"

Ambrose Fleming called the resurrection of Jesus Christ "the best attested fact in history" Yet at Easter time, vain effort is made to rationalize the stupendous event of the Resurrection in order to try to save face before pseudo-intellectualism, which boggles at the fact that the Lord of glory died and rose again, triumphant over death, over hell, and over the grave. Who, then, can dispute the following biting statements of Murdo MacDonald in his book, *The Vitality of Faith*: "Ever since the Renaissance, men have been trying to water down the Christian creed. Give us a religion purged of everything that defies logic, a religion stripped of the supernatural and emptied of miracle, a religion that is smooth and palatable and rationally acceptable-this has been the popular cry" Surely the church, weak in heart and courage, has gone out of the way to oblige.

The doom of this decaying civilization is spelled out in our crowded divorce courts, our all-time high of alcoholics and drug addicts, the number of illegitimate births or the number of abortions. A Gallup poll shows that these days most people accept lying as part of everyday business. Virtue is scorned.

Truth lies fallen in the street!

Somewhere in the archives of the British Admiralty at Whitehall, London, they have the record of a fine piece of maritime strategy. Ships of five nations were anchored in a bay in the South Pacific. A fierce storm was gathering offshore. The British captain decided to run, not away from the storm but into it. Everything available was battened down. Out crashed the ship into the boiling seas-pitching, tossing, rolling, and shuddering. Indeed, she did everything but go down. A couple of days later, buffeted but not broken, she returned to the port to find the ships of the other nations piled up on the beach.

The storm of the ages is about to break. Let the church call its crew to a new dedication. Remembering that Christ is at the helm, and with Christ's Crest as our ensign, let us run into the storm. After the storm, we, too, shall return-to see upon the shores of time the battered, piled, wrecked, hell-inspired ideologies of the hour.