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A Call For Unction in the Pulpit and Action in the Pew

By Leonard Ravenhill | November 16, 2013

Why Revival Tarries, by Leonard Ravenhill

Chapter 3: A Call for Unction in the Pulpit and Action in the Pew

When a man who has crept along for years in conventional Christianity suddenly zooms into spiritual alertness, becomes aggressive in the battle of the Lord, and has a quenchless zeal for the lost, there is a reason for it. (But we are so subnormal these days that the normal New Testament experience seems abnormal.) The secret of this "jet-propelled fellow" we have just mentioned is that somewhere he has had Jacob-like wrestlings with God and has come out stripped, but also "strengthened by the Holy Ghost!"

There are two indispensable factors to successful Christian living. They are vision and passion. Men battle mountainous seas of human carnal criticism, and storm the flinty heights of devilish opposition to plant the cross of Christ amidst the habitations of cruelty. Why? Because they have caught a vision and contracted a passion.

Someone now warns us lest we become so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly use. Brother, this generation of believers is not, by and large, suffering from such a complex! The brutal, soul-shaking truth is that we are so earthly minded we are of no heavenly use.

Friend, if you were as good at soul-cultivation as you are in developing your business, you would be a menace to the devil; but if you were as poor in business matters as you are in soul, you would be begging for bread.

George Deakin drummed into my mind many years ago this fine bit of a spiritual reasoning: A vision without a task makes a visionary; a task without a vision is drudgery; a vision with a task makes a missionary. Well said! Isaiah had a vision when Uzziah died! Maybe there is some person in your way blotting out the full vision of the Lord. Spiritual expansion is expensive and at times excruciating. Are you prepared for vision at this top-price demand... the loss of a friend or career? There are no reduced rates for revolution of soul. If you only want to be saved, sanctified, and satisfied, then the Lord's battle hath no need of thee.

Isaiah had a vision in three dimensions. Note verses one to nine in the sixth chapter of Isaiah. Verse five, WOE, a word of confession; verse seven, LO, a word of cleansing; verse nine, GO, a word of commission.

It was an upward vision... he saw the Lord; an inward vision... he saw himself, and an outward vision... he saw the world.

It was a vision of height... he saw the Lord high and lifted up. A vision of depth... he saw the recesses of his own heart. And a vision of breadth... he saw the world.

A vision of holiness. Oh beloved! How this generation of believers needs the vision of God in all His holiness! A vision of hellishness... "I am undone... unclean!" and a vision of hopelessness... implied by the words "Who will go for us?"

In this hour... when the average church knows more about promotion than prayer, has forgotten consecration by fostering competition, and substituted propaganda for propagation... this threefold vision is imperative.

"Where there is no vision the people perish." Where there is no passion the church perishes, even though it be full to the doors.

A world-famed preacher, who has been mightily used of God in the past few years in real revival (distinct and very different from mass evangelism), told the writer that he had a similar threefold vision. I can still see the solemn dread on that face as he spoke of hardly knowing whether he was having a dream or seeing a vision, not knowing whether he was

in the body or transported; yet he could see a multitude that no man could number in a large abyss... surrounded by fire... locked in the "madhouse of the universe," HELL. This preacher has never been the same since. How could he be?

Could God entrust us with such a heartbreaking revelation? Have we graduated in the secret place of prayer and in the school of suffering so that our spirits are tempered to bear such a soul-sickening sight? Blessed is the man to whom the Lord can impart such a vision!

No man lives beyond his vision. Heavy-minded theologians cannot break open the iron curtains of superstition and darkness behind which, for millenniums, millions have perished. Only men with less breadth of intellect, maybe, but with more depth of vision can do that.

To be spiritually minded is joy and peace. Yet to be statistically minded in addition can be very disturbing. Read this and weep...

JAPAN... The government there states that the population has passed the eighty-seven million mark. The nation is growing at the rate of one million one hundred thousand a year! This means that the non-Christian population of Japan has increased by five million in the past five years. Put this well up on your prayer list.

KOREA... Here are nine million people mostly refugees, homeless and foodless.

INDIA... Millions sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

MIDDLE EAST... Here are a million Arab refugees.

EUROPE... She has eleven million "displaced persons." What a heartache for them!

CHINA... A third of a million escapees are from communist China, living in squatters' huts in Hong Kong.

To add to your burden and mine, there are fifteen million Jews; three hundred and fifteen million Muslims; one hundred and seventy million Buddhists; three hundred and fifty million Confucianists and Taoists; two hundred and fifty-five million Hindus; ninety million Shintoists; and millions of others, for whom Christ died and who are mainly unreached with the blessed Gospel. Even church-conscious America has twenty-seven million youth under twenty-one years of age who receive no Christian training, and ten thousand villages that do not have a church building. Almost a million persons in the world die each week without Christ. Is this nothing to you?

This sin-swamped situation calls for unction in the pulpit and action in the pew! Synthetic religion must go. The Amen Corner has passed away with the model-T Ford; the camp meeting glory has vanished; zeal for street meetings has evaporated.

Maybe... who knows?... God is more wroth with America and England than He is with Russia! Is that shocking? Then consider soberly that millions in Russia have never heard the gospel message, never had a Bible, and never listened to a spiritual broadcast. They would go to church if they could.

The repeated prayer that the sinner might have a vision of hell may be entirely wrong. On the contrary, he probably needs a vision of Calvary, with a suffering Saviour pleading with him to repent; for after Calvary, why should he die? William Booth of the Salvation Army is quoted as saying that if he could do it, he would have finalized the training of his soldiers with twenty-four hours hanging over hell, to see its eternal torment. Fundamentalism needs this awe-striking vision again. The gusty, grandiloquent evangelist needs it most!

Charlie Peace was a criminal. Laws of God or man curbed him not. Finally the law caught up with him, and he was condemned to death. On the fatal morning in Armley Jail, Leeds, England, he was taken on the death-walk. Before him went the prison chaplain, routinely and sleepily reading some Bible verses. The criminal touched the preacher and asked what he was reading. "The Consolations of Religion," was the reply. Charlie Peace was shocked at the way he professionally read about hell. Could a man be so unmoved under the very shadow of the scaffold as to lead a fellow-human there and yet, dry-eyed, read of a pit that has no bottom into which this fellow must fall? Could this preacher believe the words that there is an eternal fire that never consumes its victims, and yet slide over the phrase without a tremor? Is a man human at all who can say with no tears, "You will be eternally dying and yet never know the relief that death brings"? All this was too much for Charlie Peace. So he preached. Listen to his on-the-eve-of-hell sermon.

"Sir" addressing the preacher, "if I believed what you and the church of God say that you believe, even if England were covered with broken glass from coast to coast, I would walk over it, if need be, on hands and knees and think it worthwhile living, just to save one soul from an eternal hell like that!"

My reader, because the Church has lost Holy Ghost fire, men go to hell-fire! We need a vision of a holy God. God is essentially holy. The cherubim and seraphim were not crying, "Omnipotent! is the Lord," but "Holy! Holy Holy!" This vast Hebrew concept needs to penetrate our souls again. If I make my bed in hell, if I take the wings of the morning... yet he is there. God compasses us in time; God, the inescapable God, awaits us in eternity. We had better be at peace with Him here, and be in the center of His will now!

To wait tremblingly before this thrice-holy One before we leave home for the day's work would be a mighty soul-stimulant. He who fears no man. He who kneels before God will stand in any situation. A daily glimpse at the Holy One would find us subdued by His omnipotence, and solemnized by His holiness. His holiness would become our holiness. Holiness-teaching contradicted by unholy living is the bane of this hour! "A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hands of God." So said Murray McChesney.

Before the experiences of the sixth chapter, Isaiah has a lot of woes for a lot of people. Now he sees himself and cries, "Woe is me!" "It's me, it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer!" How true! Are there chambers of the mind with unclean pictures hanging in them? Have we skeletons in the cupboards of our hearts? Can the Holy Ghost be invited to take us by the hand down the corridors of our souls? Are there not secret springs, and secret motives that control, and secret chambers where polluted things hold empire over the soul? There are three persons living in each of us: the one we think we are, the one other people think we are, and the one God knows we are.

Unless we are desperate to get into real victory, we are so easy on ourselves and so hard on others! Self loves self, though it was said of Gerard Majella that by grace "he loved all men except Gerard Majella." Great possibility! But too often we hide ourselves from ourselves lest the sight of ourselves should sicken ourselves. Let us invite the searching eye of God to locate this corrupted, spotted, stinking Self in us. Let it be torn from us and "crucified with Him, (so) that henceforth we no longer serve sin" (Rom. 6:6).

It will not do to call sin by some other name, saying "The other fellow has a devilish temper; mine is just righteous indignation! She is touchy; my irritability is just 'a case of nerves.' He is covetous; I am expanding my business. He is stubborn; I have convictions. She is proud; I have superior tastes." There is a cover-up for anything if you want it that way.

But the Spirit will neither spare us nor cheat us if we will expose ourselves to His infallible scrutiny. Jesus said unto , "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight" (Mark 10:51). Let us, too, pray for sight... upward, inward, and outward! Then like Isaiah, as we look upward, we will see the Lord in all His holiness; as we look inward, we will see ourselves and our need for cleansing and power; and as we look outward, we will see a world that is perishing and in need of a Saviour! 'Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24). Then only will there be unction in the pulpit and action in the pew!

Questions:

1. How many people do you know that are "so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good", and how many that are "so earthly they are of no heavenly good"? Based on your experience, which represents real trouble for the church?
2. What are the problems with the idea of being content with having been saved and sanctified?
3. Are you willing to endure life-altering agony and suffering to receive God's vision and passion?
4. What can you do to stimulate prayer both in your local church and corporately Cape-wide?