

## The Womb of Revival

### ~Other Speakers S-Z: 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.

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 bondservant. 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.

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 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.

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).

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).