

**Revivals And Church History :: Richard Baxter -smithers**

**Richard Baxter -smithers - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2007/1/6 22:57**

[Image: <http://www.watchword.org//images/stories/baxter-bio.jpg>]

**Richard Baxter**

*by David Smithers*

Many within the Church today feel as if they are drowning in a river of empty words and hollow promises. Demoralized by superficial religion, their hungry hearts are crying out, "Where is the REAL Church, mighty in truth and power?" There are many who can give us a moving definition of revival, but where are the MEN who can move the Church with a demonstration of revival? As the late Leonard Ravenhill once said, "We can all make the menu, but we can't make the meal." Proverbs 27:7 tells us that, "To the hungry even what is bitter tastes sweet." Sadly, multitudes of hungry and disillusioned souls are seeking the bitter bread of a godliness that denies power, or a form of power that denies godliness. Oh, how we need the REALITY of revival, a revival that will restore the Church to Her former apostolic beauty of PURITY and POWER. Nothing less than this REALITY will prepare us to face a dying world and the coming King.

The prince of Puritan pastors, Richard Baxter was an instrument in such a revival. Mr. Baxter possessed that rare combination of a prophet's fiery zeal and a pastor's tender care. In the year of 1647 Baxter was resettled in his old church at Kidderminster. It was here that he sparked and nurtured a mighty revival. When Baxter arrived at Kidderminster it had a population of about 3000 weavers who were reckless, ungodly and content to remain that way. By the end of Baxter's stay, the entire community was miraculously transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Dr. Bates reported that "The place before his coming was like a piece of dry and barren earth; but by the blessing of heaven upon his labor, the face of paradise appeared there. The bad were changed to good and the good to better." During this season of revival the church at Kidderminster became so full that five new galleries had to be built to seat the hungry crowds. Mr. Baxter himself writes, "As you passed along the streets on the Sabbath morning, you might hear a hundred households singing psalms at their family worship. In a word, when I came to Kidderminster, there was only about one family in a whole street that worshipped God and called upon His name. When I left, there were some streets where not a family did not do so." Kidderminster became a "colony of heaven" in the days of Richard Baxter.

With tireless zeal, Baxter fanned the flames of revival with the MIRACLE of passionate preaching. Many believe that Baxter was one of the most powerful preachers that ever addressed an English congregation. He was an intense and forceful preacher, he believed that, "If hard hearts were to be broken, it was not stroking but striking that must do it." He purposed to always, "Preach as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men." His sermons were a combination of cutting and piercing words and a gentle and loving spirit. Baxter consistently spoke like one who had been face to face with Jesus. He drew others to Heaven through his preaching because he had touched Heaven through his praying. In Baxter's classic book *The Reformed Pastor*, he reminds us that the pulpit is only a reflection of the closet. He writes, "When your minds are in holy, heavenly frame, your people are likely to partake of it. They will be able to feel when you have been much with God; that which is most on your heart, will be most in their ears."

Even after Mr. Baxter had delivered his very soul through preaching, he still felt that his work was but half done. He knew that the preaching of the Word must be accompanied by the personal and individual touch of a pastor. "He arranged that every family in his parish should come to his house, one by one...then he took each member apart and urgently, tenderly besought him to make an immediate decision for Christ. Seldom did a family leave Baxter's door without tears."

J. C. Ryle esteemed Baxter as one of the most successful pastors to ever live. He writes, "While some ministers were wrangling about the divine right of Episcopacy or Presbytery, or splitting hairs about reprobation and free-will, Baxter was always visiting from house to house and beseeching men for Christ's sake, to be reconciled to God... While others were entangling themselves in politics, and 'burying their dead' amidst the potsherd of the earth, Baxter was living a crucified life and daily preaching the Gospel." Because of Mr. Baxter's great success among his people he soon became a shepherd of shepherds. Addressing his fellow ministers, Baxter writes, "We must feel toward our people as a father toward his children; yea, the most tender love of a mother must not surpass ours. We must even travail in birth, till Christ be formed in them. They should see that we care for no outward thing, neither liberty, nor honor, nor life, in comparison to their salvation... When the people see that you truly love them, they will hear anything from you...Oh therefore, see that you feel a tender love for your people in your hearts, and let them perceive it in your speech and conduct. Let them see that you sp

end and are spent for their sakes."

Mr. Baxter's passion for souls even reached beyond the shores of England. He hoped to one day see the formation of a college and training center, where ministers could be prepared to "Undertake the conversion of some of the vast nations of infidels... with the plain and pure gospel." It should not surprise us therefore, that he greatly admired John Eliot, the famous pioneer missionary to the Indians of New England. Such apostolic vision and missionary zeal was very rare among many in the Church in the 17th century, even during the Golden Age of great Puritan preachers.

The pack mules of revival are always the humble and persistent prayers of the saints. The Kidderminster awakening was certainly no exception. It was the grace-empowered prayers of Baxter and a handful of people that prepared the way for revival. Fits of epilepsy, tumors and sins of every kind vanished in answer to the prayers of Baxter's congregation. Hour after hour they poured out their hearts with fervent prayer and fasting during this revival season. Armed with the weapon of PRAYER, Baxter destroyed demonic strongholds and reduced mighty magistrates to tears. With a broken heart and callused knees, Mr. Baxter overcame every obstacle. By fervent prayer, he overcame poor health, slander, rejection, division and even the Great Ejection of 1662. Richard Baxter considered prayer the first and last thing necessary to be a successful pastor and revivalist. He writes, "Above all be much in secret prayer and meditation. By this you will fetch the heavenly fire that must kindle your sacrifice: remember you cannot decline and neglect your duty to your own hurt alone, many will be losers by it as well as you."

In light of all the revival promises of the Scriptures, can we truly hope to see revival without such prayer? We need pastors who will not only talk about revival, but who will travail for revival. Today the Church has everything from men's meetings to miracle meetings, but we still don't have revival. Mere meetings and conferences will never be able to substitute for the power and authority of a true shepherd's prayers. "Let the priests, who minister to the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, 'Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathens should rule over them: why should they say among the people, Where is their God?'" (Joel 2:17). I fear that many pastors are naively expecting a move of God while neglecting the means of God. The Father longs to visit us. "He will come to us like the RAIN, like the latter and former RAIN to the earth." (Hosea 6:3). Yet, like Elijah, we will have to pray and pray again, before the first rain clouds of true revival are seen. Dear pastors, "ASK the Lord for RAIN in the time of the latter rain." (Zechariah 10:1).

**Re: Richard Baxter -smithers - posted by crsschk (), on: 2007/1/7 1:14**

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