

The Seeds of Revival: Insights on Preparing for Revival

Contributed by David Smithers

Evan Roberts, while reflecting on some of the challenges involved with The Welsh Revival of 1904, once wrote, "The mistake was to become occupied with the effects of the revival and not to watch and pray in protecting the cause of the revival." The lasting success of the next move of God may very well depend upon our willingness to receive Mr. Roberts WARNING! There are many today who are foolishly pursuing the effects of revival at the expense of neglecting the conditions of revival. No harvest is ever any greater than the seeds and soil in which it was planted. To neglect the seeds of revival is to ultimately plague the fruit of revival. A rich source of instruction on this subject is found in the obscure writings of Frank Bartleman. Mr. Bartleman was an active participant in the famous Azusa Street Revival of 1906. While I can not endorse all of Mr. Bartleman's doctrines and opinions, it would be foolish to ignore his genuine spiritual insight.

Tracing the Steps of the Holy Spirit

Unlike many other Church historians, Bartleman paid careful attention to each step the Holy Spirit took in preparing God's people for revival. In fact he wrote more about the Church's preparation for revival than he did about the actual revival. Being a man gifted and active in intercession, he was aware of a revival coming to Los Angeles long before many others. As Bartleman watched and prayed, he was able to accurately trace the Spirit's preliminary movements among the churches in Los Angeles. It is these kinds of observations that make Frank Bartleman's writings so rich and prophetic for our needy generation. Undeniably, revival is a miraculous work of God, BUT true revival never comes apart from the preparation and the participation of a remnant of God's people. Oh, how the Church needs to rediscover the unchanging principles of revival. It is time for a new wave of young pioneers to rise up and cooperate with the Holy Spirit's revival process. It is time for us to break up our fallow ground and once again nurture the fruitful seeds of revival. Let's now go back with Mr. Bartleman through his own personal records and writings, as he identifies these precious seeds.

Almost a year before The Azusa Street Revival, in an article written for God's Revivalist, Frank Bartleman urged the Church to prepare herself for a mighty visitation. He writes, "Christendom is rapidly assuming an attitude of expectancy, the great prerequisite for a visitation from God. The Lord is choosing His workers, our chance is at the door. This is a time to realize the vision of service, we can not afford to miss the blessing and reward He desires for us. It may be our last great chance to win souls for heaven. Oh what a privilege! What a responsibility!" Bartleman later recorded in his autobiography (My Story: The Latter Rain) how many Christians missed The Azusa outpouring because of their own unwillingness to seek revival on God's terms. He writes, "During those months preceding the Pentecost, the Spirit was constantly seeking a company through which He could manifest Himself, and gather the people. He used various agencies and instruments just as far as He could. After the Spirit had made several desperate efforts, and a number had failed Him, He finally succeeded with a crude, weak body. There was little to commend itself even in this, aside from a desperate abandonment and childlike faith. But these were the prerequisites for the beginning of the work."

Growing Expectation & Intercession

On December 22, 1904, Frank Bartleman and his wife and two daughters moved to Los Angeles. He had a unexplainable impression that God was getting ready to do something wonderful in the Los Angeles area. For months he moved around the city visiting and preaching at various Holiness missions. During this time he also came into a deeper dimension of prayer and intercession. He had been corresponding with Evan Roberts and had received encouragement from him to pray for a mighty awakening in California. Soon Bartleman began to increasingly experience seasons of intense travailing prayer. After visiting Joseph's Smale's First Baptist church, Mr. Bartleman was greatly encouraged to find some tokens of what he had been praying for. Bartleman writes, "June 17, 1905 I went to Los Angeles to attend a meeting at the First Baptist Church. They were waiting on God for an outpouring of the Spirit there. Their pastor, Joseph Smale, had just returned from Wales. He had been in touch with the revival and Evan Roberts and was on fire to have the same visitation and blessing come to his own church in Los Angeles..."

Upon Joseph Smale's return to Los Angeles, he quickly organized his church into small home prayer groups. He also encouraged his people to look for the return of the apostolic gifts to the church. The prayer meetings lasted fifteen weeks and almost immediately produced a deep sense of need and expectation for revival. Bartleman describes the meetings as follows, "(Pastor Smale) started prayer meetings in his church to wait on God for an outpouring of the Spirit similar to that which they were having in Wales. God wonderfully anointed him to exhort the people. He was full of faith for mighty things. These prayer meetings ran for a number of weeks, and there was much spontaneous worship and some very wonderful healings. Faith increased rapidly for extraordinary things. God made Pastor Smale a regular Moses to lead us toward the promised land. But soon the church dignitaries could tolerate the new, spontaneous order no longer. They ordered it to cease, or the Pastor to resign. The consequence was the Pastor wisely decided to go on with God, and the Lord and the people went with him. The cloud moved. A New Testament Church was formed. Here God wonderfully led and blessed, up to the Spring of 1906."

Resistance & the Moving of the Spirit

Sadly, the freedom in prayer and worship that Joseph Smale had encouraged was ultimately not accepted by some of his fellow Baptists. One of the first signs of this was seen in their open attack on the Spirit of prayer. Bartleman describes one such occasion, "At Smale's church one day I was groaning in prayer at the altar. The spirit of intercession was upon me. A brother rebuked me severely. He did not understand it. The flesh naturally shrinks from such ordeals. The groans are no more popular in most churches than is a woman in birth-pangs in the home. Soul-travail does not make pleasant company for selfish worldlings. But we cannot have souls born without it. Child bearing is anything but a popular exercise these days. And so with a real revival of new born souls in the churches. Modern society has little place for a child-bearing mother, and so with the church's regarding soul-travail. There is little burden for souls. Men run from the groans of a woman in travail of birth, and so the church desires no groans today. She is too busy enjoying herself." Again Bartleman comments on the Baptist leader's unwillingness to go on with God. "I went to Smale's church that night, and he resigned. The meetings had run daily in the First Baptist Church for fifteen weeks. It was now September. The officials of the church were tired of the innovations and wanted to return to the old order. He was told to either stop the revival, or get out. He wisely chose the latter. But what an awful position for a church to take, to throw God out. In this same way they later drove the Spirit of God out of the churches in Wales. They were tired of His presence, desiring to return to the old, cold, ecclesiastical order. How blind men are! The most spiritual of Pastor Smale's members naturally followed him, with a nucleus of other workers who had gathered to him from other sources, during the revival. They immediately contemplated organizing a New Testament church..."

Pastor Smale established the First New Testament Church in Burbank Hall at 542 South Main Street, Los Angeles, in

early 1906. For months the newly organized church experienced great freedom and blessing. However, before long they too were struggling to keep in step with the Spirit of revival. Bartleman became very concerned for this little fellowship which once looked so promising. "The New Testament Church seemed to be losing the spirit of prayer as they increased their organization. They now tried to shift this ministry on a few of us. I knew God was not pleased with that, and I became much burdened for them. They had taken on too many secondary interests. It began to look as though the Lord would have to find another body. My hopes had been high for this particular company of people. But the enemy seemed to be sidetracking them now, leading them to miss God's best for them. They were now even attempting to organize prayer, a thing impossible. Prayer is spontaneous. I felt it were better not to have organized than to lose the ministry of prayer and spirit of revival as a body. It was for this they had been called in the beginning. They had become ambitious for a church and organization. It seemed hard to them not to be like the other nations (churches) round about them. And right here they surely began to fail. As church work increased the real issue was lost sight of. Human organization and human programs leave very little room for the free Spirit of God."

"It is very easy to choose second best. The prayer life is needed much more than even buildings or organizations. These are often a substitute for the other. Souls are born into the Kingdom only through prayer. I feared the New Testament Church might develop a party, sectarian spirit. A rich lady offered them the money to build a church edifice with. The devil was bidding high. But she soon withdrew her offer. I confess I was glad she did. They would soon have had no time for anything but building then. It would have been the end of their revival. We had been called out to evangelize Los Angeles, not to build up another sect or party spirit. We needed no more organization nor machinery than what was really necessary for the speedy evangelizing of the city. Surely we had enough separate rival church organizations already on our hands. Each working largely for its own interest, advancement, and glory. The New Testament Church seemed to be drifting toward intellectualism. I became much burdened for it. I felt the New Testament Church was failing God, and I was looking to see where the Spirit might come forth. The curse everywhere was spiritual pride. Hiding their nakedness from God. The oil (The Holy Ghost) ceases to flow, as in Elijah's time when there are no more empty vessels to be filled. People do not sense their need of God. But wherever there is a hungry heart, God will fill it. 'The rich or (full) He has sent away empty.'"

The Holy Spirit Moves Again

"They did not break through at Pastor Smale's assembly (The First New Testament Church). There was too much reserve there. God had taken them as far as He could." Yet God was still determined to find a people whom He could use to bring revival. He now moved in among a small group of humble and praying people at 214 N. Bonnie Brae Street. Bartleman found himself among them just as the revival fires started to burn. He writes, "March 26, I went to a cottage meeting on Bonnie Brae Street. Both white and colored saints were meeting there for prayer. I had attended a cottage meeting shortly before this, at another place, where I first met Brother Seymour. He had just come from Texas. He was a colored man, very plain, spiritual, and humble. He attended the meetings at Bonnie Brae Street. He was blind in one eye. There was a general spirit of humility manifested in the meeting. They were taken up with God. Evidently the Lord had found the little company at last, outside as always, through whom he could have right of way. There was not a mission in the country where this could be done. All were in the hands of men. The Spirit could not work. Others far more pretentious had failed. That which man esteems had been passed by once more and the Spirit born again in a humble stable, outside ecclesiastical establishments as usual. A body must be prepared, in repentance and humility, for every outpouring of the Spirit. They decided to wait on God in a ten-days special petitioning of God and in yielding themselves to Him. The time had come. God had found the right company at last."

Soon the meeting at Bonnie Brae became dangerously crowded and another place had to be found for the prayer services. The meeting was moved to 312 Azusa Street under the leadership of William Seymour. Discerning as usual, Bartleman describes the spiritual atmosphere in and around the new meeting place; " They opened public meetings in old Azusa St. in an old Methodist Church that had been for a long time in disuse, except as a receptacle for old lumber, plaster, etc. It was very dirty. A space was cleared large enough to seat a score or two of persons. We sat on planks resting on old nail kegs, if I remember correctly. But God was there. The work began in earnest. The fire had fallen. It was on the 9th of April 1906, that the Spirit was first poured out on Bonnie Brae. On April 18th we had the terrible San Francisco earthquake. It had a very close connection with the Pentecostal outpouring... This shook the whole state, as well as the nation. Men began to fear God... Their conscience needed to be knocked at. This paved the way for the revival. Otherwise they would have mocked us.... God suddenly shut up many little Holiness Missions, Tent meetings,

etc., that had been striving with one another a long time for the preeminence. It would not work any more. They had to come together. God only could tame them.

There was little going on anywhere else, but at Azusa St. All the people were coming. Even Pastor Smale finally came to Azusa Mission to hunt his people up. Then he invited them back to let God have His way. The fire broke out at his own Assembly also. When God dries a place up, it is dry. This, many churches which opposed the Azusa work soon found out to their sorrow. And many are yet sorrowing over it. They would not take God's way. They were also among the prophets, but when the Lord came He did not come through them. This killed them. They would not go to Azusa, nor let Azusa come to them. Azusa was despised in their eyes." Bartleman continues, "The present Pentecostal manifestation did not break out in a moment, like a huge prairie fire, and set the world on fire. In fact no work of God ever appears that way. There is a necessary time for preparation. The finished article is not realized at the beginning. Men may wonder where it came from, not being conscious of the preparation, but there is always such. Every movement of the Spirit of God must also run the gauntlet of the devil's forces. The Dragon stands before the bearing mother, ready to swallow up her child.- (Rev. 12:4.) And so with the present Pentecostal work in its beginning. The enemy did much counterfeiting. God kept the young child well hid for a season from the Herods, until it could gain strength and discernment to resist them."

Revival Preparation & Cooperation

Frank Bartleman's writings are a prophetic reminder that there are distinct seasons of revival that require our preparation and cooperation. Revivals don't just mysteriously happen, they are born through a cooperative effort between the Church and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit begins this process by filling us with a holy discontentment over our own impotence and spiritual barrenness. Next, in response to our hunger, He imparts a divine seed vision for revival deep within us. God then requires us to become broken and willing to cooperate with this vision in an ongoing process of faith, humility, repentance and prayer. Truly, God is the only one who can open the womb of revival, yet no revival is ever born without much costly travail and cooperation by the Church. In the Kingdom of God there is no such thing as the luxury of a surrogate mother or a cesarean. We must become willing to be painfully stretched and disfigured, as we carry and nurture the growing sparks of revival within us. Sleepless nights, a change of appetite and unusual pains are all part of carrying a developing child. Are you willing for your life to be radically changed and inconvenienced in your pursuit of revival? God longs for a help-meet, a co-laborer, a bride through which He can father a revival of His presence. In God's love and wisdom He has sovereignly chosen to use frail human beings in this birthing process. Therefore it is possible for us to hinder or even completely abort the work of revival within us. Let us BEWARE lest we quench or miscarry the work of the Holy Spirit through our own unbelief and neglect. Like the young virgin Mary, it's time for us to totally yield to the Father's desire, saying " Let it be done unto me according to your word." Luke 1:38.

I believe the opportunity for a lasting revival stands before us today. We need to recognize the time of our visitation. The Holy Spirit is imparting the vision for revival within many hearts. This is no time to be experimenting with untested church growth theories, borrowed from books. Clever human schemes will never substitute for a lack of true heart preparation and travailing prayer. By neglecting these, I fear many are needlessly squandering away their last opportunity for true revival. "Opportunity once passed, said Frank Bartleman, is lost forever. There is a time when the tide is sweeping by our door. We may plunge in and be carried to glorious success and blessing and victory. To stand on the bank shivering from timidity, or paralyzed by stupor at such a time is to miss all, and most miserably and eternally fail. Oh, our responsibility! The mighty tide of God's grace and favor even now is sweeping by us, in its prayer directed course." Opportunity is pounding at our door. The Father is searching for a people who will yield to His revival birthing process. "For the eyes of the Lord run to and from throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is LOYAL to Him." (2 Chronicles 16:9)

The Father has already begun this process among some of His praying people. Still if such a remnant of revival pioneers are to succeed where so many others have failed, they must avoid the mistakes of their forefathers. Within nine years of the Azusa Street Revival, Frank Bartleman was expressing deep concern for the future of the Pentecostal movement. He recognized that many of the revival participants had become distracted by the effects of the revival and thus lost sight of God's primary purposes for revival. By neglecting the roots of the revival, Bartleman believed they had inadvertently cursed the spiritual fruit they so dearly desired. Our modern churches must take heed and learn that there are no

shortcuts to lasting revival. " Except a kernel of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone: but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit. (John 12:24)" There will be no true and lasting revival until we die to our own pride and selfish ambition. We must let God the Holy Spirit have control of His Church again. We need to repent and let the knocking Bridegroom back into His house. In early 1905 Frank Bartleman wrote, "I received from God the following keynote to revival: The depth of a revival will be determined exactly by the depth of the spirit of repentance..." Again he writes, "A body must be prepared, in repentance and humility for every outpouring of the Spirit." This is one of God's great unchanging laws of true revival. It applies to all people and for all times. We can not afford to ignore these clear warnings from our spiritual forefathers any longer. There will be no glorious, end-time harvest until God finds a people who will embrace and nurture the fruitful seeds of revival; FAITH, HUMILITY, REPENTANCE and PRAYER.

References: How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles - by Frank Bartleman, MY STORY: The Latter Rain by Frank Bartleman, The Apostolic Faith Restored by B. F. Lawrence, The Time of Our Visitation by Frank Bartleman, God's Revivalist, The Revival by Frank Bartleman, Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements by Burgess, McGee and Alexander, Vision of The Disinherited by Robert M. Anderson