

THERE WAS A MAN SENT FROM GOD

by, Leonard Ravenhill

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The sealed heavens had opened! At last, the centuries-old wailing – "*Oh, that Thou wouldst rend the Heavens*" – had been heard and answered in an unusual way. Four crawling centuries of spiritual midnight had ended by the shattering presence of a man more incandescent than Halley's Comet.

The people who had been to the Temple that day and seen the high priest in his garments of glory and of beauty would find it difficult to accept this bearded eccentric of chronic austerity and unrefined tone as a prophet sent from God. But Jesus said of this unusual, unpredictable, uncompromising man: "*Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist...*" (Matt. 11:11). The secret of this amazing man is easy to discover. He had a single eye to God's glory, a single purpose to do God's will, and a single message to hail and introduce the Christ, the anointed of God, as the world's Redeemer.

A Message of Righteousness

John's message was righteousness. He was troubled that God's laws were broken, His Sabbath defiled, His house made desolate. John's attack was not against an effect but against a cause – sin. He said sin would ruin men as individuals, destroy communities, and that it would shatter nations, adding that righteousness exalteth a nation. He was a success by any measure of standard, as a prophet. Socially he reached all classes, all were sick of unrighteousness, injustice and oppression. Like flames on a burning building at midnight, this desert-bred prophet attracted the soldiers, foreign legions, the people, and the publicans. He spoke a language they had not heard, but they understood it. He spoke the truth, a thing lost in that day and in this day also.

"Now the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Matt. 3:10). John had no easy believism. He did not offer a smiling penitent "pie in the sky, nor a mansion over the hilltop and a crown of glory, plus a free ticket to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, and a perpetual reward of rulership over five cities" all for a two-minute apology to God, plus a baptismal ritual.

There is much talk today of the gifts of the Spirit, and they are beautiful when genuine; less talk of the fruit of the Spirit; still less emphasis of "*bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance*" (Matt. 3:8).

Many a modern evangelist, usually a cheerful fellow, offering free pardons for mighty offences against a Holy, Righteous God, offers too much for too little. Now some people may charge us with demanding works for salvation. Well, if repentance preaching is offering works, lay the charge at John the Baptist's feet, lay it on Jesus (Luke 5:32), lay it against Peter for his Pentecost sermon.

Spirit-Anointed Preaching

There are as many types of preaching as there are types of preachers. Some preaching is edifying but not convicting. Some is directed to the emotions, some to the intellect. That of

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Jesus, and John the Baptist and Peter attacked the conscience as well as the will. These three had one thing in common, the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Before His ministry, Jesus was anointed of the Spirit and declared it, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach...*" (Luke 4:18). Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, and then lifted his voice and preached to the people (see Acts 2). It was said of John the Baptist what was not said of any other man that ever lived: "*He was filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb*" (Luke 1:15).

Our present-day effete evangelism with its emphasis on happiness would have shocked John the Baptist. We try to induce happiness on a heart diseased with sin. We offer bandages to folk who need radical spiritual surgery for the cancer of carnality in the breast.

We preach to produce peace in the heart. John the Baptist preached to produce panic! The undisturbed prophet disturbed everyone else. Look at this picture: Spirit-anointed John the Baptist, preparing the way of the Lord, scorched all hearts as he preached a Word quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.

Heathen soldiers heard John the Baptist and found that their breastplates of shining armor could not keep the arrows, fire-tipped with God's judgment, from entering their hearts. The afflicted soldiers cried, "*What shall we do?*" (Luke 3:14).

Having severed their bloodline to Abraham as invalid for either mercy or forgiveness, the people cried to John the Baptist, "*What shall we do?*" (Luke 3:10). The covetous, conscienceless publicans withered under John the Baptist's soul attack, and they, too, cried, "*What shall we do?*" (Luke 3:12).

Tears and Travail

The men who preach our revivals are evangelists, not revivalists. Revival shatters the status quo. We can no more have a Spirit-born revival without a moral and spiritual upheaval, than we can have an earthquake without destruction.

With all our know-how and technical advances in agriculture, men still do not gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles. Neither do we get Holy Ghost revivals "over the air" or by staging mass crusades. Babies are only born after travail (Isa. 66:8). Revivals are birthed by spiritual giants, not slick talkers and golfing evangelists. Let history teach a few lessons right now.

When a woman said to George Whitefield, "Sir, I have listened to you preach five times in three days and each time I have been wetted with your tears," she was revealing that the great soul winner had himself wept for lost men in the secret place.

Remember, will you, that in a day without mass communications, the only way to reach a meeting was on foot, or by carriage which few could afford, or on a horse. Yet when the population of Boston, Massachusetts, was only 12,000, Whitefield drew 14,000 a night to hear him. No blacktop roads, no restaurants, no motels, buses were not known, trains were not there. Yet, such was the magnetism of a Spirit-filled man that the crowds listened and were moved of the Lord.

The plain but unusual preacher, John Smith, followed on the heels of Wesley. He says, "I am looking for deeper baptisms of the Holy Ghost." He urges another minister, "Get deeper

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baptisms," and adds, "If we were always filled with the Holy Ghost before we got to the house of God, we should see signs and wonders."

Tears for the lost were the daily exercise of these revivalists. The mighty Jeremiah said, *"If ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eyes shall weep sore, and run down with tears"* (Jer. 13:17). The Prince of all preachers wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). Arthur Fawcett says, "...the prophet is a manifestation of God's activity." History demonstrates this opinion.

An experience of God that costs nothing is worth nothing, and it does nothing. I am convinced that the reason we do not have earthshaking revivals like old times is that we are content to live without them! Or, aware from the histories of these saints, that, while evangelism can be started and finished at the whim of men, revival can only be at the greatest cost, tears, travail, and the mercy of a Sovereign God.

I am sure that we are ineffective preaching before men because we are impotent in pleading in prayer before God. Tell me, with all the enthusiasm you have, about the shattering, soul-gripping preaching of Finney. I will reply with, "Yes, but remember that he had Nash and Clary holding him up in prayer twenty-four hours a day, like Aaron and Hur held up the hands of Moses." While Finney pled with men in public, Nash and Clary pled with the Lord in secret. Result: Revival!

God Has His Prophets

Let no Christian's heart fail him because it seems that the enemy has come in like a flood, that the voice of the prophet is not heard in the land. God has His men hidden. They will come forth without price tags, with nothing to sell, nothing to promote but His message, nothing to organize, nothing to propagate but "holiness unto the Lord."

John the Baptist came at a critical hour in the history of Israel. The parched souls sought him in the heat-laden desert. Remember again the stirring and, I think, stinging words of Professor Harold Kuhn of Asbury Seminary, "Christianity was not served to the world on a silver platter; it was born into a sophisticated world with a totalitarian power over it."

England, dead under the teaching of Deism and thickly foul with corrupt politics, hardly offered loving arms of embrace to the Oxford scholar, Wesley. Injustice, unequal taxation, vice, drinking, etc., were all at a premium at Wesley's entree. To the nation dead in politics and with icicles on the pulpits and snowmen in them, Wesley brought the torch of Spirit-anointed preaching and the nation melted before him.

The cultists and purveyors of false doctrines, with millions to spend on scattering their false doctrines worldwide, offer us greater challenges than Wesley or Finney had, but not greater than our God is able to deal with. Our present evangelism offers men a change of destiny – Biblical regeneration offers men a new Spirit-born personality, then destiny.

Revival is the Lord's doing and is marvelous in our eyes. Wet-eyed, heartbroken revivalists produce wet-eyed, heartbroken sinners at the feet of a Holy God. "True revival," said dear Dr. Tozer, "changes the moral climate of a community." Men like John the Baptist burned their names on the history of the world.

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I say again, the cost of getting near to the heart of God, hearing the voice of God, and doing the will of God, is great. God cannot be hurried. The back side of the desert, lonely, poor, uninviting, quiet, is the place where the bush burns, where the voice is heard, where the vision is given, where the marriage to His will takes place.

From the school of prayer, from the desert place, men fired in the furnace of revelation and coveting only strength to do His perfect will, emerge to upset nations and deliver the people. The school of the prophets is never overcrowded. There is no known curriculum. God shapes the man to suit the hour. One simple factor is obvious in them all, they are all lonely men, private men, passionate men, powerful men, persecuted men. They know that they have to bleed to bless.

Lord, Send Us Revivalists!

At the moment, we are a broken nation, broken financially, morally, and spiritually. If we were half as spiritual as we think we are, we would be going to the house of the Lord in sackcloth with a handful of furnace ashes to anoint our unworthy heads. But we still play church. We still delight in shallow preaching and offer shallower praying. Our sackcloth and ashes would be less conspicuous than Isaiah *"walking naked and barefoot"* (as a slave) for three years as a sign.

Jeremiah mourned the sin of the people. His castigations of their iniquity cost him a spell in the stocks, the inside of a prison, and the misery of sleeping at the bottom of a muddy well. He knew better than to say, "peace, peace," when there was no peace. He alone knew the pending judgments of God. He sat alone because of the wrath of God (Jer. 15:17).

Oh for men who will wait upon the Lord, hear His voice, get a baptism of His power and an authority to deliver His message to a sick church and a dying world.

We have labored in the flesh too long. We have interpreted success by material gain – bigger buildings for our churches, bigger crowds for our hearers, bigger offerings as proofs of His favor. We have had weak preachers too long – God give us giants! We have had promoters too many, Lord send us revivalists. We have played evangelism with a hundred gimmicks; Lord give us, in this dark hour of human history, some John the Baptists to burn and shine, some Knox to say, "Give me Scotland, or England, or America, or I die."